

# The INDEPENDENT

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## Publisher's final words on the paper's closure

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views to have expanded my thoughts and understanding in ways I could not have imagined.

With limited available advertising and competition, it still comes down to one thing.

I apologize to our readers, contributors and advertisers for being unable to weather the tough economic conditions plaguing our nation. I feel I should have been able to sell more advertising or come up with better plans than I did, in order to keep the community's newspaper running. The truth is simple, I couldn't do it. With all the talented and dedicated columnists volunteering their time to provide us with valuable, quality content, I should have been able to do better. I did not, for that I am truly sorry.

My biggest concern is that *The Independent* will no longer serve as your government watchdog, helping to keep government honest and accountable to you, the people, the taxpayers.

When a newspaper dies so does a bit of democracy and with it a free and open society.

I do not think you can rely on Scott Laird and Vernonia's Voice to care about accountability in government or to stand up for the free speech of others. He started his publication after he became upset at our reporting on the apparent lack of budget knowledge of City Administrator Dick Kline and how Kline responded to our questions. Laird stormed into the offices of *The Independent*, accosted editor Rebecca McGaugh and began yelling that he was going to start a newspaper and put us out of business.

The following is from the Ford Family Foundation newsletter, referring to Laird and *The Independent*: "Scott and some participants in his leadership training started discussing the role of a community newspaper, and reached the conclusion that the current paper in town was not meeting the community's needs. They felt that the local newspaper should be a positive force in the community".

Laird has consistently shared the City of Vernonia's views. In an editorial in February, 2010, when the City was in denial about Police Officer/Captain/Chief Mike Kay, Laird said this in characterizing our attempt to hold government accountable: "...the continued campaign of personal attacks and attempts to ruin careers. A campaign that has been more about using a news publication as a weapon to carry out personal vendettas than it has been about truthfully reporting the news— which is not only unprofessional, it's unethical".

Laird again followed the lead of City staff in a May, 2011, editorial, after the City had finally acquiesced to an investigation of Kay. Addressing Vernonia City Councilor Birch after she voted to fire City Administrator Bill Haack for allowing the investigation, Laird wrote: "The citizens had a right to know just what the accusations were against a police officer in their community, someone they are expected to trust, respect and look up to. That is real transparency, not what you are doing— trying to cover up the facts about an investigation".

*The Independent* agreed with the City on this, but there were no grounds to accuse Birch of a cover up. That was a personal attack because she disagreed with the city administrator, in the same vein as his personal attacks on me because I disagreed with city administrators.

Laird is getting what he wanted, *The Independent* out of business. What does the rest of the community get?

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## More from *The Independent's* founder

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gible for assistance from a special fund. Getting them to seek those funds with a proper application was much harder than pulling teeth; all they would do is say they deserved it, then complain about the money going to Mist-Birkenfeld. It was too much effort to supply information about projects or equipment needed, much less any estimate of how much those items might cost.

I hadn't known much about the special (gas field) "impact" fund until I started serving on the Columbia County budget committee. As I learned more, I realized that the county commissioners *wanted* to award some of the funds to the Vernonia fire district, which wasn't cooperating. Persuasive education was needed: I cajoled, explained and bullied until they understood. The district applied with all the necessary information, sent the fire chief to answer any questions, and received enough money to add an ambulance bay, meeting room, administrative offices and upstairs EMS space to the fire station on East Bridge Street.

Along with the primary reasons for the addition, another justification was that the space could be used during an emergency, which proved to be true almost immediately. The Clatskanie High School girls basketball team had a game at Banks High School and, on their way home, an ice storm hit. They got as far as Vernonia, but it was too dangerous to continue. Calls went out to volunteers, who supplied food and sleeping bags. Everyone was safe and warm in the meeting room, and they were able to go home the next day.

Reporting on the school district board of directors was a job I never liked; school activities, fine, but not the school board. My problem was a personal bias developed as the daughter, sister and wife of teachers, exacerbated by my own experience (I couldn't take P.E. but was required to take a C grade, fouling up my grade point average.), and other observations before I came to Vernonia.

One small incident illustrates a problem that existed in Vernonia. On the door of the Washington Grade School gym

was a hand-written sign that said, "No food or drink's in the gym." When I pointed out the grammatical error to the principal, his response was "Oh well, it's old." It was many years older before it was removed.

A more important issue was student drug testing. We opposed the policy of random, suspicionless drug testing of high school students for reasons that remain valid. Such a policy declares that students are considered to be drug users unless they are cleared in a urine test. A student didn't have to be "acting like they were under the influence", or doing anything else suspicious, they just had to attend VHS.

The district's "reasoning" ranged from unbelievable to laughable: The policy would "keep kids from using drugs." They didn't include steroids because they "could tell" when a student was using steroids. They didn't include alcohol because "it left the system too quickly."

Initially, the board wanted to apply the policy to all students, then limited it to athletes for a very cynical reason – they did

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