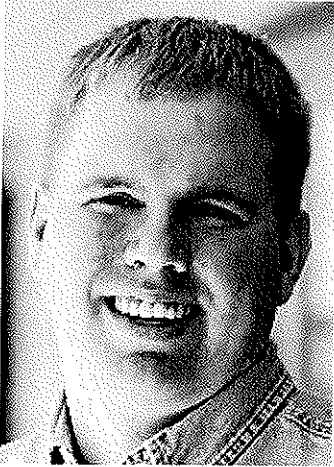


HIS VIEW: An issue of facts, not emotions

By Henry D. Johnston

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Johnston

About a month ago the city of Moscow hosted a public forum to discuss the potential of moving ExxonMobil's megaloads through Moscow on U.S. Highway 95. The meeting was preceded by a good old-fashioned protest, demonstrating the true size of a megaload and decrying what it will do to Moscow's precious trees.

It has been a long time since Moscow's hippies have dug out their leather vests, put on their Birkenstocks and readjusted their graying ponytails in an effort to rally "the movement" against "the man." There's something about a protest to get the blood pumping and, as the Berkeley of north Idaho, Moscow really knows how to throw one.

Quite frankly, I've missed it.

After watching the video of the public forum (courtesy of local politico Tom Hansen) I think it's pretty obvious the vocal minority of Moscow's residents don't care about the movement of the megaloads as much as they care about the broader impact of what happens when the loads arrive at the Kearl oil sands in Canada.

While I'm not unsympathetic to the broader implications, I think it's inappropriate to try to block the transportation of these loads through Moscow simply because you might disagree with the end result. In my book, doing so is akin to stopping a funeral procession on its way to the cemetery because you disagree with burial as a way to care for our dead.

At their May 16 meeting, the City Council discussed the megaload issue after a very informative and thoughtful presentation by City Supervisor Gary Reidner. At the end of the presentation, Councilman Walter Steed made the motion to accept the report and, at the same time, invite ExxonMobil to use our hotels, buy fuel and food and make Moscow their resting point once the loads reach the Latah-Benewah County line.

Each council member made well-reasoned arguments in favor of letting the loads pass through Moscow. Dan Carscallen pointed out we already have 200-foot loads move through Moscow in the middle of the night when several chip trucks get traveling in a convoy, and Sue Scott said there is plenty of noise created downtown by the closing bells at Mingles and the Corner Club.

Steed's motion ultimately passed despite the strong objections of Mayor Nancy Chaney. Since then our councilors have taken some pretty heavy and unfair criticism of their actions.

But before anyone starts making accusations or generalizations about the irresponsibility of our current City Council, I would remind everyone that the most irresponsible behavior ever shown by an elected official in Moscow was by none other than Mayor Nancy Chaney regarding the sale of water to the Hawkins development.

In a memo dated Nov. 19, 2007, to the City Council and city administration (after numerous appeals to prevent water right transfers to Hawkins) Chaney advocated selling water to Hawkins "at a price, with conditions." She also attended the confidential mediation with the Hawkins Companies in Spokane and presented the mediation agreement to the council.

It was only after the council voted to approve the agreement, at Chaney's express request no less, that she then took a strong about face and condemned the sale of water to Hawkins. If you want to talk about irresponsibility by an elected official, that one takes the cake.

The megaload issue is truly one of facts.

- Fact - state highways, over which Moscow has very little jurisdiction, go through our town.
- Fact - state-federal roadways are designed to further transportation and interstate commerce.
- Fact - Moscow's police chief, fire chief and city streets supervisor all said there would be no adverse impact to public safety, fire/medical response time or even to the infrastructure of the roadways that the loads will be traveling.

Megaloads are and should be an issue of facts and not emotions.

The Moscow City Council deserves megakudos (with all puns intended) for making an educated decision based on the facts of this issue.

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