

# City Watch *It's Time*



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**“It is not the function of our Government to keep the citizen from falling into error; it is the function of the citizen to keep the Government from falling into error.”**

U.S. Supreme Court in American Communications Association v. Douds, 339 U.S. 382,442

## Abatements. Why Should I Care?

*By Robert Drake*

One thing is certain: Unless citizens take effective action, our property taxes will go up and up and up in the coming years. Your taxes will definitely be 2% higher next year and then increase 2% a year every year after that.

The housing market is at an all-time high, and the Vanguard assessments reflect a national trend of the housing market-NOT A VALLEY CITY HOUSING BOOM. Any banker or legitimate appraiser will tell you that the Vanguard assessments are so far out in left field that their valuations are not even considered by them for a home.

So, what can we average citizens do to let the powers that be know we can "carry a big stick?" If enough of us take action, we can actually be effective by using the abatement process.

### **FIRST, WHAT IS AN ABATEMENT?**

This is a good place to start. An abatement is a formal appeal which puts into motion the process of reassessing your property. After you pick up abatement forms from the city or county, the following steps are required:

1. You have to file two copies of a completed abatement form with the county auditor. (By doing this, you agree to allow the assessment officials in to inspect your property.)

2. The county auditor presents a copy of the application to the city auditor within five business days after the date it is filed. Within 10 days after receiving the application, the city auditor must notify the applicant (you) of the time and place of the hearing before the local governing body. There you can state your case as to why you feel your assessment was wrong. (For example: Other homes in your area are of less value than yours. Or you have had a recent appraisal that conflicts with the Vanguard appraisal. Or you feel the assessment is unfair or unjust. Or there was a mistake in the number of bedrooms or square feet of your home. All these things are important to keep records straight for the future.)

3. Within 60 days after the hearing notice, the local governing body considers the application.

4. The local governing body recommends to either grant or reject in whole or in part and sends the recommendation to the

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## Are We Being Kept In The Dark On Purpose?

*By Rocky Kowalski*

As I sit here trying to formulate my ideas for this article, I realize I probably don't have enough knowledge to comment on some subjects. However, I do know that our city and county governments have ventured into a business transaction to build a multi-county jail/law enforcement center somewhere in or near Valley City.

Another thing I am sure of is that the general public knows very little about this venture because information is very slow to leak out from the offices of our commissioners.

**"It seems to me that the public has been kept in the dark on this issue [the new jail]. Is this intentional, and have we...missed our chance to voice our opinions?"**

Questions have been directed to our commissioners about the new jail. Letters have been written to our local newspaper asking questions about it. Questions have been asked-but very few have been addressed.

It seems to me that the public has been kept in the dark on this issue. Is this intentional, and have we completely missed our chance to voice our opinions? I hope not because that means the city has put the cart before the horse, and everyone knows that never works.

Next I was shocked to learn that economic development funds are being used. And, get this: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is backing this venture! Heck, I thought USDA funds were for farmers, not to be used as a loan guarantee for a risky business that will involve various counties trying to cooperate to run a jail!!

I also understand that the new jail will be governed by a

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# Danger At Mill Dam

By Barry Borg

Does Valley City leadership really care about the safety of it's workers?

In the fall of 2004 I had the opportunity to visit with the Mayor about a serious danger to any worker of the Valley City Water Department-the gate at the Mill Dam.

**"I showed the Mayor that there are no guard rails [at the gate of Mill Dam] where a worker must walk and stand while doing his work. A little ice, one slip, and our worker is in some very turbulent water."**

This gate controls the water level for the intake for the city water plant. It is opened and closed with a heavy tool placed on a vertical shaft to drive the mechanism. I showed the Mayor that there are no guard rails where a worker must walk and stand while doing his work. A little ice, one slip, and our worker is in some very turbulent water.

The Mayor agreed and thanked me for bring this matter to his attention.

However, nothing has yet been done.

Now, in the summer of 2005, one of our city commissioners seriously considered proposing an ordinance to require a high fence around every private wading pool, swimming pool, etc. (If this is going to be inclusive, would we not have to require such a fence around the entire riverbank in Valley City?)

I do appreciate the concern of city leadership that a little one might wander into a neighbor's yard and fall into a pool, but to require the citizen to fence his pool and yet not provide a guard rail at the Mill Dam? This smacks of hypocrisy.

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county auditor no later than 30 days after the local hearing. (I know this all sounds like a lot of you know what, but believe me- at the end there is a pretty big stick.)

5. At its next regular meeting, the board of county commissioners considers the application. The applicant has the opportunity to present information in support of the appeal at this hearing (just as at the city hearing).

6. If the county commission approves the application, the assessment is corrected. If the tax has been paid, a refund is issued. If the county commission rejects the application in whole or in part, it must mail a written explanation of the rationale for the decision to the applicant. Now comes the big stick.

7. The decision of the board of county commissioners MAY BE APPEALED TO THE NORTH DAKOTA DISTRICT COURT.

(The big stick is that if enough people fill out abatement forms to show a pattern of incompetence and mistakes on the Vanguard appraisals [for example, on my house alone Vanguard made three mistakes], we would have the opportunity to tell a judge our stories.

I believe that we will get little satisfaction from the city or county because they are the ones who hired Vanguard. However, if through the abatement process we make the city and county put their decisions in writing as to assessment values, there will be no way to justify many assessments in a court of law.

Everyone reading this really needs to get an abatement form and fill it out. If you need help, someone from CCI will be glad to help, but you must make the first move.

We at CCI like to say, "Stand up and be heard," and that is what we would like you to do through the abatement process. Mayor Riley Rogers would like all of us to sit down and shut up. What will you do?

For more information, call 490-2380 or e-mail valleycitycci@yahoo.com.



Mill Dam Gate Control

**CCI would like your opinion.**

**Please use the address or email at the top of the first page. We will print those we can. Thank you.**

In The Dark cont. from page 1-

board of directors composed of various officers from each county. One thing really bugs me. With Valley City holding 50% interest in this venture, what will happen if the involved counties realize it is not panning out, so they bail out. Will we taxpayers have to dig deep into our pockets to satisfy the note?

And if this jail is built, what are the plans for our old jail? Will it be torn down to make room for a heating and air conditioning building to service the Court House? Or will it become parking for the Court House and school?

**"...What will happen if the involved counties realize it is not panning out, so they bail out. Will we taxpayers have to dig deep...to satisfy the note?"**

These and many more questions need to be addressed by the city and county commissioners.

Personally, I don't like the feeling of being alienated from the very infrastructure that was created to serve the public. I don't like being kept in the dark and having information dropped on me when it's too late to do anything. And up to this point I do not believe the actions of our local government on this matter have been proper and professional;

by leaving so many questions unanswered, our city and county representatives have not shown respect for their constituents.

Perhaps we need to be thinking of the upcoming elections. It will be another chance to stand up and be heard. It's a chance to effect a change in local government. With a good selection of candidates, I believe a change of command will take place, and local government will change the way they do business with the public.

**"Perhaps we need to be thinking of the upcoming elections. It will be another chance to stand up and be heard."**

# Government Spending Can Be Cut - *But Only One Way Will Do It*

By Duane Stahl

Job Training: \$20 billion/year, 165 programs. 342 economic development programs. Juvenile programs, \$4 billion/year. 788 education programs, \$100 billion/year. 70 war on drugs programs, \$16 billion/year. Fraud and overpayments, Medicare system - \$23 billion/year. US government welfare 1998 - \$40 billion. Amtrak, one year, \$860 million. Community Development Block Grants, \$4.5 billion/year. Federal spending, agriculture 2003, \$16.4 billion.

Politicians always talk about "unnecessary" spending but get reelected time after time with promises of spending more and more. Like those before him, "conservative" George W. Bush promised cuts-but (besides Iraq) has multiplied spending on everything from education to medical.

The father of our Constitution James Madison said: "The government of the United States is a definite government, confined to specified objects. It is not like state governments, whose powers are more general. Charity is no part of the legislative duty of the government."

Well, then, is there any way at all to control spending? It certainly cannot be done by "cutting waste" because we know that has never happened.

What programs can we cut? What agencies and departments should go? A better question is: What should stay on a permanent basis? That's easy: only those functions specifically outlined in the Constitution. Is foreign aid allowed by the Constitution? No. Public housing? No. Education? EPA, OSHA, BATF? No. Is protecting our borders? Yes. And gradually on a time-table, we must say goodbye to ALL subsidies-to education, farmers, business, students, etc. If we just brush that aside by saying, "Oh, well, that will never be done," I fear we don't really care about our form of government-A Constitutional Republic-not a democracy.

As a U.S. Congressman, famed frontiers-

man Davy Crockett voted for a measly \$20,000 to help families near the U.S. Capitol after a terrible cold-winter fire. Back in his home district, he met a very well-liked local farmer and leader who, Crockett said, told him: "You will very easily perceive what a wide door this would open for fraud and corruption and favoritism, on the one hand, and for robbing the people on the other. No, Colonel, Congress has no right to give charity. ...You have violated the Constitution.... It is a precedent fraught with danger to the country, for when Congress once begins to stretch its power beyond the

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## Comments That CCI Has Received

I think that the people of Valley City owe a great debt of gratitude to you. You guys take all the flack. You take your valuable time and use it to help the citizens take back control of the city from the officials who seem to have forgotten who they are supposed to be serving. They need to be held accountable for their actions and you guys are a great "watchdog" helping to make this possible. Thank you very much. -A.S.

I love you guys..... good job!!!! -B.A.

We want to extend our sincerest thank you to everyone at CCI. Because of your raising awareness here in VC, we will stand up and be heard!!! -V.G.

Really enjoyed your volume one, number one pamphlet!! It is a start, but before anything will chance you have to get good and honest people elected. Keep up the good work and I can't wait to read the next edition. -M.B.

# National ID Cards May Soon Be Reality

Rejection of national identification (ID) cards has been shown in poll after poll.

Against the will of our citizens, Congress passed the Real ID Act as part of a spending appropriations bill for the Iraq war and tsunami relief. Beginning in July 2006 federally approved ID cards will replace traditional drivers' licenses and soon become the primary identity credential for US citizens.

Therefore, North Dakota recently awarded a five-year contract to Viisage, a Massachusetts based high tech company to design and implement our new secure state driver's license to comply with the federal Real ID Act.

Thereafter, North Dakota drivers' licenses will indeed be national ID cards. Although they may continue to look like ordinary ND drivers' licenses, they will contain a standardized set of information collected by North Dakota; underneath our state's pretty

design will be a single standardized national card-backed up not only by biometrics but also by a standardized "machine-readable zone" and by a national database of ID information.

Local DMV offices may even continue to look like state offices, but personnel will actually become agents of the federal government, charged with issuing national identity documents without which one will be unable to function in America.

Several Senators, like Lamar Alexander (R-Tennessee) and Dick Durbin (D-Illinois), say this legislation will have unintended consequences and will not improve national security. Instead, the creation of a single interlinked database will create a one-stop shop for identity thieves and terrorists who want to assume American identities.

Security problems created by concentrated databases have been demonstrated in recent months by a rampant number of breaches in which information has fallen into the hands of identity thieves and others. The government's record at information security is not much better, especially at

Motor Vehicle Departments that have routinely been targets of fraud and larceny.

National ID cards make observation of citizens easy but won't do much about terrorism. Such documents do not reveal anything about evil intent, and determined terrorists will always be able to obtain fake documents by counterfeiting or from corrupt officials.

Another very real danger. The REAL ID Act requires every person to reveal his permanent home address-no PO boxes-no exceptions. What about judges, police and undercover cops? Hey, let's endanger our police and judges even more than they are now.

Call, write, or email your state and national representatives. We need to stand up and be heard on this.

**"Beginning in July 2006 federally approved ID cards will replace traditional drivers' licenses...."**

**"...North Dakota recently awarded a five-year contract to Viisage...to design and implement our new secure state driver's license to comply with the federal Real ID Act."**

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limits of the Constitution, there is no limit to it, and no security for the people."

President Pierce vetoed a bill to help the mentally ill and Cleveland one to assist drought-inflicted Texas counties because neither could find authority in the Constitution for such spending. BUT (not the first to do so, of course) Bush reacted to the tsunami disaster with this: "We pledged [Did he mean he and Mrs. Bush pledged? Of course not.] an initial \$35 million in relief assistance." He noted that in 2004 the U.S. government gave \$2.4 billion in food, cash, and humanitarian relief for disasters. He said this shows "...we're a very generous, kindhearted nation." Of course we are. And through VOLUNTARY giving, we have always shown that.

It is often said our founding fathers could not foresee our world in 200 years. Very true, so they included a very specific method of amending the Constitution to change with the times. They did not just add a statement that the President, Congress, and courts could do anything they wanted.

Also, why did the colonies insist on the tenth amendment before signing the Constitution, the one that says all powers not specifically given to the US government by the Constitution are reserved to the states and the people?

**"What programs can we cut? What agencies and departments should go? A better question is: What should stay on a permanent basis?"**

Before we became a nation, a Scottish professor, writing about the fall of the Athenian republic, concluded: "A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves money from the public treasure. From that moment on the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most money from the public treasury, with the result that a democracy always collapses over loose fiscal policy followed by a dictatorship."

Ever wonder why we didn't need a US income tax before 1913?? Is there any doubt why our founding fathers did not have US Senators elected directly by the people but instead appointed by state legislatures? One reason is that they wanted to keep at least one house of Congress from "buying" votes with promises of pork-spending.

Somehow, we must return to being a nation limited by the law of the Constitution, not one being ruled by the whims of men.

"National ID Cards Won't Stop Terrorism or Illegal Immigration. Criminals don't obey laws! As with gun control, national ID cards will only affect law-abiding citizens. National ID cards will be used to track the law-abiding masses, not criminals. The REAL ID Act also requires states to participate in the "Drivers License Agreement," This agreement creates a massive database of sensitive information on American citizens that can be shared with Canada and Mexico!" -Congressman Ron Paul (R-TX)

**"Is there any way...to control spending? It certainly cannot be done by 'cutting waste' because we know that has never happened."**

# CCI POLL

Please send replies to:  
CCI, PO Box 403, Valley City, ND 58072

or email: [valleycitycci@yahoo.com](mailto:valleycitycci@yahoo.com)

*Feel free to include comments.*

1. The west city park bridge needs to be replaced. Would you favor...  
\_\_\_A) a basic well designed safe bridge built economically?  
\_\_\_B) a replica of the present bridge which will cost all of us much more?
2. Special Assessments- Do you favor...  
\_\_\_A) the current practice of special assessments?  
\_\_\_B) a city-wide cost-sharing of roads, water pipes, sewer, sidewalks, etc?
3. Do you favor...  
\_\_\_A) our police station centrally located (as it is now)?  
\_\_\_B) moved to the proposed regional jail if it is located on the outskirts of town?
4. Should the citizens of Barnes County be given the opportunity to vote for or against the proposed regional jail?  
\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No \_\_\_Not Sure
5. Do you favor our North Dakota drivers licenses being turned into National ID cards complete with federal database containing our personal information?  
\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No \_\_\_Not Sure

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**Past issues of "City Watch" are available or if you would like to receive future newsletters electronically, just send us an e-mail at [valleycitycci@yahoo.com](mailto:valleycitycci@yahoo.com).**

## *Mission Statement*

The Committee for Community Involvement is an inclusive nonpartisan coalition of Valley City area citizens working together for the following purposes:

\*To encourage local government to listen to and implement the wishes of the citizens

\*To encourage local government to provide accurate and complete information to the citizens

\*To encourage citizen involvement in local decision making

\*To encourage all members of local government to maintain high ethical standards and to remember always their accountability to the citizens they represent

\*To strengthen our community by protecting the individual liberties of citizens and their posterity

\*To provide citizens with a means to **Stand Up And Be Heard**

**CCI Pancake Fundraiser**  
**Sat., Feb. 18 ~ 7-10 AM**

**\$5 Adults ~ \$3 Children 6-12 ~ Free 5 & Under**

**BUDGET BURGER**

951 WEST MAIN ST ~ VALLEY CITY