

Tone matters in debate over public access

In their resignation letter last week, five members of the Grant County Public Access Advisory Board offered an unintended irony when they pressed the County Court to embrace rules of respect for others and against all personal attacks. While criticizing the Court for its actions, the letter failed to acknowledge that some members of the access board have run afoul of those very rules with their own comments in recent meetings and communications. The lack of civility in the road discourse has been striking, and they must share the responsibility for that.

To be sure, the County Court played a role in the eventual meltdown of the access board. The Court created the board out of a genuine desire for a participatory process last summer, but it was a rush job. The confusion and contentiousness that ensued was almost preordained. The members were appointed to a vague purpose, without the Court providing a detailed charter for the board or setting sideboards for its operations. Unlike other appointed boards and committees, this group was left largely on its own to chart its course.

It's no surprise, then, that the board morphed into sort of a public-private hybrid. Indeed, we suspect those who quit the board last week will be far more comfortable as a private group than as a county body. That was suggested a few weeks ago in an email exchange obtained from the county by the Eagle, through a public records request.

In the exchange, County Judge Scott Myers asked Jim Sproul, then chair of the access group, to restore the forest supervisor's name to the board's mail list. Sproul replied that the access board's "private email list" had been deleted, and that

any personal emails sent by board members would be "for information only to concerned citizens of our choosing." He made it clear that "all emails sent by the access board members to interested citizens of Grant County are for information purposes only and are private."

That blending of private communications and public duties suggests the separation last week was inevitable, and probably a good thing. Today, these members are free to pursue their goals with roads – and any other issues – as private citizens, without the constraints of transparency that go with serving on a public board.

Still to be seen is whether the tone of the road discussion improves. So far, we're hearing an escalation of angry talk on some social media platforms; a few of the more strident voices in the wider road debate are targeting individuals, businesses and agencies for personal criticism and scorn. It's not clear how this happened, but we've apparently reached a point where demonizing those with different views is seen as an effective strategy to attain one's goals.

We hope that as the discussion moves forward, the former members of the access board will embrace the respect and tolerance rules they urged on the Court and encourage others to do the same. They have the potential to be a force for positive movement – or stalemate – on these issues.

As for the Court, we urge the members to firm up the charge of the access board before filling any vacancies and moving ahead. We also urge them to adopt specific rules of conduct for their own meetings and to post them clearly, so that all members of the public – no matter what their opinions may be – will feel comfortable attending and participating. – SC

CORRECTIONS

• Last week's article about the three American Legion Auxiliary ladies honored should have included the following information about Ruth Harris, the organization's current president. At the Feb. 16 Sweethearts' Dinner, her granddaughter, Rhonda Millwood, told the audience of the public service work and activities of her grandmother

during her membership since 1983.

• A Feb. 25 article about a Circuit Court hearing had a typo in the name of the attorney representing Roy Peterson; it should have said D. Zachary Hostetter.

Errors may be reported to editor@bmeagle.com or by calling 541-575-0710.



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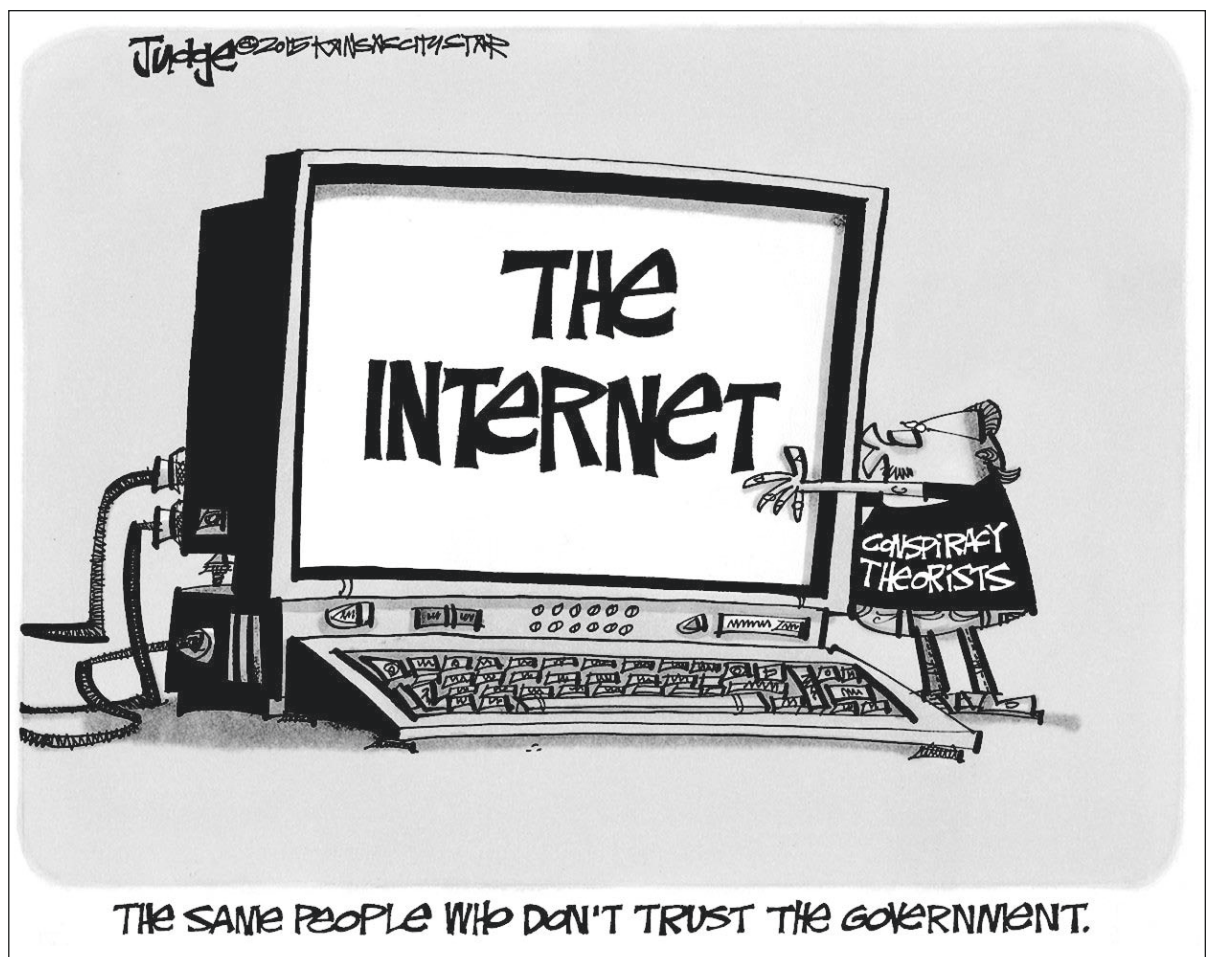
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Kudos to hospitals

To the Editor:

Over the past three months I had the need to clear up a medical thing, first with the Veterans Administration hospital in Boise. I know there has been a lot of bad press for the VA hospitals, but I can tell you firsthand that I received great care.

I was transferred to Blue Mountain Hospital for follow-up care, and I cannot say enough good things about our local hospital. Everyone – from the kitchen staff, to housekeeping, the nurses and CNAs, the lab – went the extra mile to make my stay as pleasant as possible. The director of nursing services and the new temp administrator stopped by a couple of times just to check and see how things were going.

When three ambulances arrived in 15 minutes, additional staff was called in so the level of care was not decreased, and those who came in were very willing to jump right in and do what was needed.

We are blessed with a hospital that is supported with our tax base and a local board of directors. I for one will be supporting our local hospital in every way I can.

I hope you don't need their services but if you do, you will be in good hands.

Eddie Smith
Prairie City

Roads or timber?

To the Editor:

When did we come to the point in Eastern Oregon that we found ourselves negotiating our access to public lands for timber harvest, and why is this an acceptable model for our elected officials?

The answer lies directly under our noses, but for the fact that a great deal of us don't know it exists. Collaboration and the bringing together of "interested" parties to negotiate projects is killing our individual rights each and every day.

The Grant County Court, as one example, has decided to align itself with the financial interest of Iron Triangle and the "stewardship contract." In order for Iron Triangle to move forward with getting its projects completed, they must keep the Forest Service happy.

Mr. Beverlin, supervisor for Malheur National Forest, made this very clear in early February when he informed the American Forest Resources Council that any interference or preventing the Forest Service from performing road closures will jeopardize timber outputs on the forest.

That is where we have come as a region and where the Forest Service has come to as an agency. You don't support what we want to do, we'll break you, period, end of story. So, what other choice do these companies have? Either Hells Canyon Preservation Council litigates a timber project if it's not closed afterwards, or the Forest Service simply does not allow the project because you can't keep the public shut up about it.

This isn't just in Grant County; it's throughout the Eastern Oregon counties and the only way to address it is to tell the commissioners that our motorized access is not to be negotiated.

We're being held hostage, friends. Who stands up and says enough is enough?

John D. George
Bates

A dearth of honor

To the Editor:

The "Cs" have it.

Coercion, collusion, collaboration, concealment, consorting, and corruption. I have been personally exposed to all in one form or another since 1986 after joining the ranks of the Forest Service. After shaking free of the erratic government militia 10 years ago, I felt slightly vindicated.

I thought to have found the perfect opportunity attempting to right the wrongs done to the American people by supporting their right to free access of their public lands, only to find that self-serving interests exist at all levels of government.

Now the "Ds" have it as well: dishonor, dishonest, (mis)direction, deception, derision, and debasement, which leaves me with a total feeling of disgust. There are few honorable men or women left in the political world from all indication.

It only took me a short period of time to find the one person in county law enforcement committed to serving the interest of the people and is worthy of respect. Most are involved in selfish interests and grandstanding, which eliminates their view of justice and patriotic duty (dishonor); hiding self advancement and financial gain (dishonest); leading people to view their actions as being for common good (deception); scoffing or ignoring the efforts of those seeking to represent the people of this county (derision and debasement).

I missed (mis)direction which is the shell game of what rock is the snake now under.

Now being labeled as "activists" to camouflage the attempt to represent the people that, to date, local and federal governments have miserably failed to do. You don't have to sit on top of the barrel to smell the spoilage within, so in self-interest, I will deny any association with un-American entities that are striving to take control of our lands from the people who paid for it, support it, and fought for it.

The only "weapon" you need to be concerned about from me is my right to freedom of speech which your attempt at misdirection can't deter.

Judy Kerr
Canyon City

Girls take aim

To the Editor:

Grant County often has nearly equal attendance of boys and girls at Hunter Safety Class. In the rest of the state there are usually 80 percent boys to 20 percent girls.

As the visiting coordinator said, "You are way outside the norm." Daughters of the pioneers, I salute you!

Katy Nelson
Canyon City

Credit to Cheyne

To the Editor:

In response to the letter "Focus on logging?" in last week's paper: I think we should give Christy Cheyne a job well done for trying to implement a plan that logs some of the millions of

dead trees over 21 inch DBH in the Malheur National Forest.

In communities all over Eastern Oregon the logging of these trees would be a much needed boost. There are thousands if not hundreds of thousands of acres of trees that need this same attention in every county in Eastern Oregon.

The misuse of our greatest resource can be felt in every community in these counties also. Schools, businesses and the economy as a whole has depended on these resources as a lifeblood.

Instead of commenting negatively on the Draft Environmental Assessment I urge people to write Mrs. Cheyne and comment positively on this plan, and hope that plans like this are used all over our forests to help school funding, restore jobs that have been lost and give our small rural communities a chance for a bright future. And also to reward the Forest Service for thinking outside the box to get some much needed attention to our Forests.

Ben Holliday
John Day

Parklike home not good for deer

To the Editor:

I'm writing this letter to Steve Beverlin, Malheur Forest supervisor, on behalf of Bucky Mule Deer and his family:

Steve, the 10-year forest initiative that your forest is working on now is destroying our homes. The loggers are removing all the habitat that we need to survive.

They are taking all of the little trees, the brush, the browse we feed on, and leaving an area where we can look for a half a mile through the remaining trees and see nothing we can hide in. There's nowhere for our babies to hide in order to escape being killed by a coyote, and if they are lucky enough to grow up, they have to dodge the cougars. We will be crowded in to smaller and smaller areas or forced to retreat to private land and that's not good, because too many of us on private land makes the ranchers unhappy.

Our numbers are declining and the loss of habitat is part of the reason. I have lost some of my family and a good many of my friends. As far as we are concerned, the loss of our homes is not management, but destruction.

We need a place to rest and get out of the bad weather and hot sun, and a place to escape hunters during hunting season. Can't you tell the loggers to leave a mosaic pattern of cover for us when they cut the timber? Or cut fire breaks? Fire breaks and a mosaic pattern of timber removal would help us immensely, and it would create the fire control that you are seeking, that has been proven in the past.

What has happened to common sense?

Reasonable logging is good for us and the mills need the logs, and that's OK, but not the radical cutting that is being done in much of our home now. A parklike home is not good for us, and never has been. – Bucky Mule Deer.

Dean Elliott
Canyon City

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