

GUEST EDITORIAL FROM THE BEND BULLETIN

HB 2931 would incorrectly restrict access to executive sessions, lawmakers should pull it

State Rep. David Gomberg, D-Neotsu, says he has absolutely no intention of reducing public access to public process. But his bill, House Bill 2931, would do just that.

It would deny journalists access to closed-door executive sessions if they do not “ordinarily and customarily report news on matters under consideration by the public body.” That would mean unless a media organization regularly reports on actions of the public body the public body could decide to exclude them.

In Oregon, the news media can attend executive sessions. Journalists act as watchdogs. They ensure the public body is not making decisions in secret, among other things. HB 2931 would make that harder.

Consider an example. Let’s assume a reporter from The Bulletin wanted to cover a meeting of the Harney County judge and commissioners during a tense occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. The judge and commissioners march into executive session. Under HB 2931, the county could bar The Bulletin reporter from attending because The Bulletin does not usually report on the Harney County Court. That is not an improvement in the law.

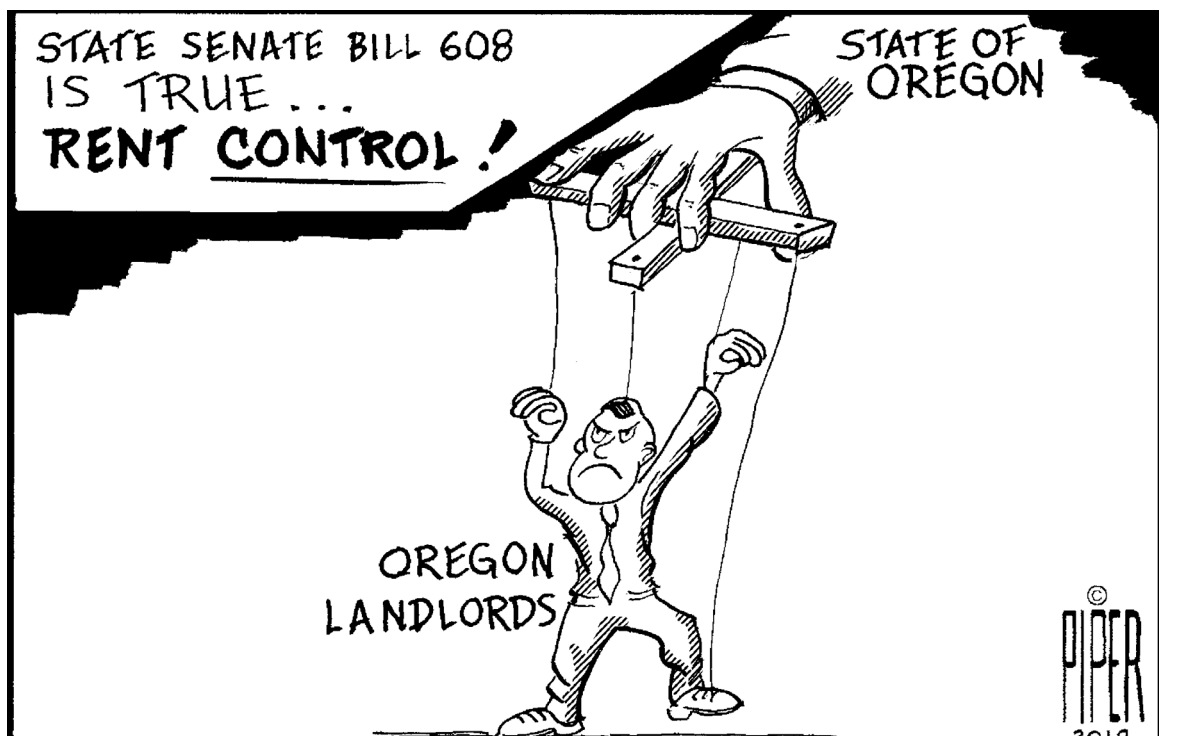
Don’t think for a second that public bodies don’t already try to exclude journalists. On Aug. 13, 2013, a joint committee from the Bend City Council and the Bend Park & Recreation District was meeting to make policy recommendations on the future of Mirror Pond. A Bulletin reporter and editorial writer showed up to report on the meeting. Bend Park & Recreation District Executive Director Don Horton ordered them to leave. Attorneys for both public bodies later said the meeting should have been open to the public. Who knows what happened at that meeting?

HB 2931 has other problems. It also would require each news organization seeking to attend to an executive session to adhere to ethical standards without clearly defining what the ethical standards are. That lack of clarity is a mistake.

When we talked to Gomberg about his bill, he told us he was simply trying to fix some parts of the law. “Journalism is changing more quickly than our rules,” he said. It was introduced on behalf the League of Oregon Cities, though the bill fails to identify that.

For instance, one statement in the bill makes it clear that journalists should include nontraditional media, such as bloggers. Scott Winkels of the League of Oregon Cities said another intent of the bill is to clarify that people with a connection to a matter in executive session can not attend that session.

Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum has already clarified both those points in a written opinion. Gomberg and Winkels told us they would look again at the language in the bill. “Bills evolve,” Gomberg said. They should just pull it from consideration. ■



Trump is a result of the severe division in this country, not the cause

I would like to respond to the letters that have been published blaming the current administration for the divisive conditions in our country.

These divisions were already underway well before Donald Trump announced his run for president. They were in place during and before the Obama administration.

There used to be compromise between sides in the political process. Both sides worked together for common good and goals. The main arguing points involved the means used to achieve these goals. Bi-partisan work and compromise allowed the legislative process to move forward.

In recent times we are seeing division where the parties no longer share common goals. One side wants to fundamentally change the country and the other to preserve it. This is obvious in both state and national politics. The metro areas ignore the needs and desires of the rural areas. The progressives want to force change in the way rural and conservative citizens live and to increase government programs and power.

The unwillingness of the left to compromise, its continued press to silence any conservative voice in the discussion, and the continued drive to disarm law-abiding citizens (taking away their right to self-defense) is viewed by a large number of Americans as an assault on them and the United States and Oregon constitutions.

For example: The current proposed and existing gun control “red flag” laws would allow hearings where the accused is not informed, present, represented by a lawyer or allowed to know who his accuser is. He is not aware until law enforcement shows up to confiscate his guns, and he is not allowed to challenge the order for a year. He then

has to prove that he is competent to get his weapons back. Further, medical and other persons are required to report any conditions the state would consider reasons to take away their rights under the Second Amendment. An obvious result of this is you are telling anyone who was ever in the military, law enforcement, has PTSD or depression to keep silent about it. If they try to deal with it, they could lose their rights. Also, their Second, Fourth and Sixth amendment rights are denied.

The attempt to demonize defending our rights (gun owners and the NRA are racist or terrorists) is an assault on our First and Second amendment rights.

The pressure for laws defining hate speech and making it a crime is a direct assault on the First Amendment’ free speech guarantee. The constitutional limitation on free speech is only that it not contain incitement, true threats, fighting words, perjury or false advertising. Freedom of speech does not protect criminal behavior (assault as in anti-fa or alt-right activity, property damage, blocking traffic). When the left defends these activities as a right to free speech or protest, it is a slap in the face to law-abiding citizens.

President Trump’s election was the reaction of middle America to what is increasingly viewed as attacks on our way of life and values. Oregon already has 13 counties with Second Amendment Protection Ordinances that say any laws that violate the amendment cannot be enforced, and more are working on them. If this divisive trend continues, I believe we are headed for a bad end. The last time the country was this divided was in 1860. In 1861 we were in a Civil War. There are a lot of citizens in Oregon and America who would rather see the

My Voice ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patrick L. Owen, 63, lives in La Grande. He is a veteran of the U.S. Navy and a business owner. My Voice columns reflect the views of the author only. My Voice columns should be 500-700 words. Submissions should include a portrait-type photograph of the author. Authors also should include their full name, age, occupation and relevant organizational memberships. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those published elsewhere. Send columns to La Grande Observer, 1406 Fifth St., La Grande, Ore., 97850, fax them to 541-963-7804 or email them to news@lagrandeobserver.com.

state or nation divide than let their rights be removed.

The only legal way to change the constitution is by an amendment passing with two-thirds vote in both House and Senate or two-thirds of the state Legislatures in a constitutional convention, followed by ratification in three-quarters of the states (38 of 50). Laws cannot change the constitution — the constitution limits laws.

When one complains about the divided status of our state and nation, please note that if only one side is required compromise, or continued compromises on the same issue are required of the same side, that is part of the problem. Continuing to demand further compromise on the same issue is no longer compromise, but strong-arm tactics. ■

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