

OTHER VIEW

Gov. Brown sends government further into secrecy

Gov. Kate Brown said when she first took office that throughout her career she has "sought to promote transparency and trust in government, working to build confidence that our public dollars are spent wisely. As governor, this will not change."

As governor, it has changed.

She issued an executive order that allows local governments to post required public notices about their budgets only on their own websites. That's like the fox guarding the henhouse.

It has nothing to do with protecting public health during the pandemic. It's an attack on government transparency.

You have probably seen public notices in newspapers. They are those long, wordy, technical and dry ads usually in the classifieds. They can make your eyes glaze over faster than a parking spot is scooped up on Wall Street in Bend — at least in the down-



EO Media Group file photo

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown, seen here in 2016.

town before the pandemic.

Public notices, though, have information that is important to people, such as how the government plans to spend taxes. And they are required by law. They exist so the public knows what their government is doing, so government is transparent and open.

Public notices are reported to have begun in English newspapers in 1665 with what was later renamed as The

London Gazette. It published notices from the King's Court, from London officials and so on. The practice later spread to the United States. Congress made it a requirement in 1789 for the federal government to publish similar notices in newspapers.

So much has changed. The internet makes it much easier to share information and to find it. State and local governments across the country have pushed for the freedom to

only publish such notices on their own websites.

The biggest argument for that is: It's free. It costs money to run legal notices in newspapers, and newspapers makes money from legal notices.

But the important issue is getting information to the public. Where does the public look for such information? In newspapers. Remove it from newspapers and bury it on a website and who will see it? That precisely could be the goal.

The internet is available almost everywhere. But as we all know, and politicians and school officials say again and again, not everybody has access to it. Why would the governor make a move to secrete more information on the wrong side of the digital divide?

The other issue is the absence of connection between the change and the pandemic. We asked the governor's office about that. We were told that the change was

made at the request of local governments who were concerned about completing their budget processes on time.

That argument just does not make sense. Publishing legal notices is part of the routine. It's not an onerous requirement. Where is the danger to public health and safety? What's the problem? There isn't one.

Gov. Brown has done her best during the pandemic to balance public health, the economy and keeping government operating and open. When there's a threat like COVID-19, politicians can use it to make changes with less public scrutiny. Never let a good crisis go to waste, as the saying goes. Gov. Brown chose this crisis to undermine public access to information about how tax dollars are spent. She has changed.

About the Author

This guest editorial is from the Bend Bulletin Editorial Board. The EO Media Group owns the Bulletin along with The Observer.



OTHER VIEWS

Pandemic restrictions highlight blessings we take for granted

What The Bogota Post got right about America before COVID-19 rings just as true during the pandemic — maybe even more true. In a May 2019 article,

TOM PURCELL SYNDICATED COLUMNIST

"The List of Things Americans Take for Granted," the newspaper examined some of the freedoms and blessings that too many Americans forget they have.

Amid the pandemic — as we all get a taste of having some of our freedoms curtailed — perhaps it should be easier to remember how good we've had it.

Free speech is one right we ought never take for granted.

"As we have seen recently in America, political tensions are running at an all-time high," reported The Post. "But

people are entitled to their opinion and in America, you can express this without fear of repercussions . . ."

Some refer to our leaders with vulgar, crass expressions. Some make allegations about politicians that facts don't support. Others — a regrettably small percentage — take the high road by making reasoned arguments about what they think of ideas or policies. Whatever Americans

say publicly or post on social media, nobody fears government hit squads kicking down their doors in the middle of the night. Try that in many other countries and see what happens.

"In China, Thailand or, as has recently been seen in Hong Kong, expressing your political views, even in a diplomatic way, can lead to your imprisonment or even worse, the death penalty," reported The Post.

Another right too many Americans take for granted is voting — choosing our government's leaders and policies.

The integrity of the vote is central to a well-functioning republic. It lets us settle our differ-

ences at the ballot box, not on the battlefield.

Our two-party system has its flaws, but, said The Post, "some countries have a one-party system where you can only vote for candidates who stand for that party. Other countries don't even (have) an illusion of democracy — they have a dictator in charge and his or her word is what makes the law."

Comparing the U.S. to developing countries, The Post noted that clean tap water and abundant electricity are taken for granted. Both result from the freedoms that unleash massive wealth creation. Our economic horsepower funds massive projects that deliver power and drinking water

across our great land.

Before COVID-19 did a number on our economy, some Americans took abundant jobs for granted. Our robust free markets enable entrepreneurs to innovate, creating jobs that enable millions to thrive.

Earlier generations were happy just to have a good-paying job. Today's Americans can choose paths that are meaningful to them. Don't like what you're doing? Try something else — open a restaurant, start an online business, get training for the job you want.

The Post article captures well the great irony of America: The better off we become, the more we complain about how bad things are.

"Americans often take for granted these freedoms and privileges and with social media and a consumerist society it is easy to feel unhappy with what you haven't got rather than what you have got."

Exactly. COVID-19 is temporarily restricting some of our freedoms and blessings. Let's make sure they're fully restored when that challenge has ended.

Let's make sure we preserve them for future generations to fully experience and appreciate.

About the Author

Tom Purcell, author of "Misadventures of a 1970's Childhood," a humorous memoir available at amazon.com, is a Pittsburgh Tribune-Review humor columnist.

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THE OBSERVER
An independent newspaper founded in 1896
(USPS 299-260)
Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, Oregon 97801. Published Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (except Dec. 25) by EO Media Group, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)
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