

OUR VIEW

A halfhearted commitment to open government?

Here's an editorial for the people who work in Oregon government. They can be excused for not getting as wound up about government transparency as journalists or other members of the public do.

But Oregon governments from the governor's office down to the dog boards are supposed to be transparent. They are in a number of ways. But they don't always put their heart into it. Sometimes they don't follow the law. So when one part of Oregon government calls out another part of Oregon government for not being transparent, we pay attention.

The Oregon Secretary of State's Office recently released a follow-up to an audit it did in 2019. That original report encouraged the state — and in particular the state's Department of Administrative Services, or DAS — to enhance the transparency in the state's budget.

If it's not easy to find out where the state gets its money or how it spends it, that's a problem.

The department did implement a number of recommended changes since that 2019 audit. It worked with the Legislature to allow additional money be spent to beef up the state's transparency website. And it hired a consultant to compare what Oregon does against some of the best practices of other states. That's good.

But DAS is not monitoring a practice of state agencies to use non-budgeted positions. And it's not using its position on the Transparency Oregon Advisory Commission to encourage the commission to meet regularly and release transparency reports required by law in a timely manner, the report said.

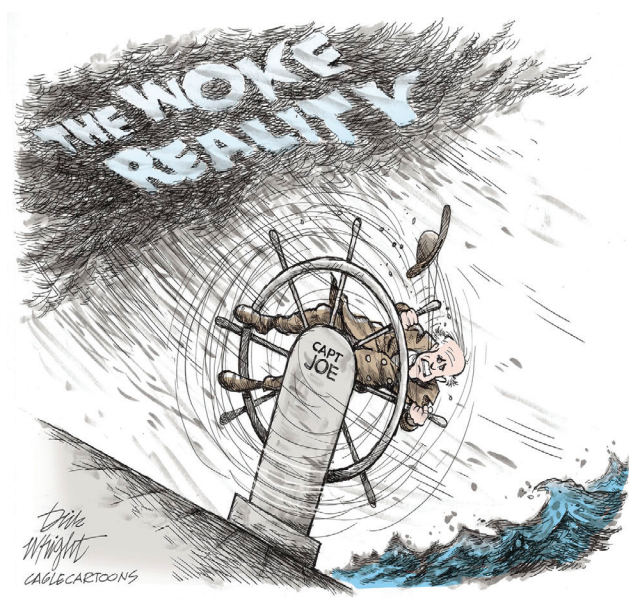
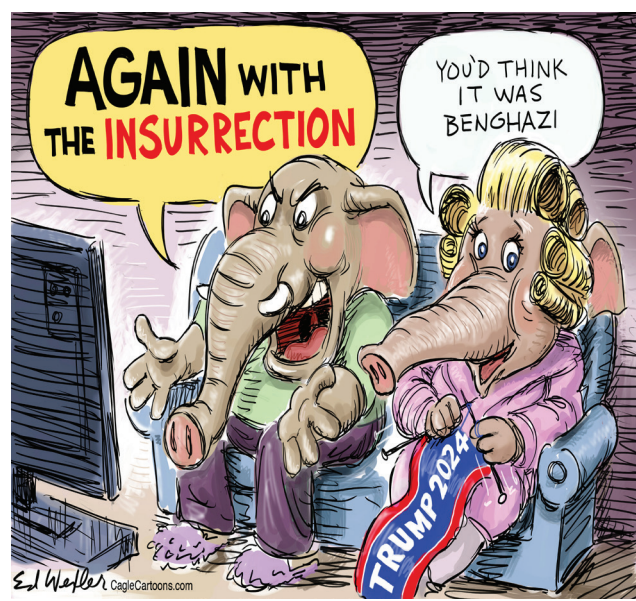
For instance, there's a requirement in state law that the commission shall report to the Legislature on completed improvements to the transparency website and ways to improve it further by Feb. 15 of each odd-numbered year. The Legislative Fiscal Office missed that deadline in 2019. It apparently has missed it again this year. At least, we couldn't find it on the office's website.

EO Media Group emailed last week the two members of the Legislative Fiscal Office assigned to the commission to ask what was going on. No response.

The impact of the pandemic on state staff could have certainly been a reason. There could be other parts of a heavy workload that they chose to prioritize. It would be nice, though, if they were transparent about why they aren't filling a transparency obligation required by state law.

One other thing struck us about the way the Department of Administrative Services — which it is important to note is overseen by Gov. Kate Brown — responded to the audit. DAS chose to respond to some of the audit recommendations with what state auditors called "extraneous responses." DAS declined to even disagree or agree with some of the audit recommendations.

Do some employees at DAS not have a commitment to transparency in their heart? Is Gov. Brown going to insist they act like they do?



My secret mushrooming spots



BILL ANEY
THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

My mushrooming roots run deep. About the time that spring turkey hunting season winds down, my forays into the National Forest shift to searching for another wild delicacy, the morel mushroom. I come by this pastime honestly, as I was exposed as a teenager to the wonders of mushrooms by my mother and grandparents.

Grandpa Elden Johnson in particular was a brave explorer into the world of wild fungi. He was known for occasionally trying what he called "just a small sample" of an unknown mushroom to see if it was delectable, barely edible or would make him sick. This is definitely not a recommended way of learning about mushrooms, but as a result of his style Grandpa's suite of mushroom species that collected for the table was a lot broader than mine.

I know morels, king boletes, shaggy manes and corals, but I remember him also talking enthusiastically about oyster mushrooms, chicken-of-the-woods and slippery jacks, none of which are on my positive go-to list.

Somewhere in my collection of papers I have a manuscript he wrote about the wonders of mushrooming in the Blues. He challenged the reader to take time to meander slowly among the trees soaking in the sounds, smells and feelings of the

spring woods. His words resonate in me every time I step into the forest in search of mushrooms, and I find that it is easy to fall into a meditative state. No wonder mushroom hunters get lost so often.

What I wouldn't give for one more chance to go with my grandpa to some of his favorite mushrooming spots in the Blues, for his haunts are lost to memory now. But I have started to develop my own mushrooming spots, and I like to think that some of them are the same pieces of ground that my grandparents used to walk.

This spring has been incredibly dry, and while turkey hunting I noticed how the forest floor was crunchy, more like August than May. But last week we had just a bit of rain, and my good friend Matt and I decided it might be time to look for mushrooms. We found the woods to be teeming with people heading out for Memorial Day weekend, with camps tucked into small forest openings and vehicles parked in wide spots along the forest roads.

Undaunted, we slipped into the woods and moved from one known honey hole to another, and after an hour of searching had collected exactly one medium-sized king bolete, one morel and one fresh coral mushroom. We moved down the road, parked at a road closure gate and hiked 20 minutes to another spot I had marked last year with my GPS. As I entered into the stand, my eyes were first drawn to the abundant corals.

These are not my favorite, so I continued my mushroom meander

when I was rewarded by — a morel. I bent down to cleanly sever it from the stalk and saw another, and another and another. That's how morel hunting goes, and by crawling on hands and knees I was able to collect several dozen in just a few minutes.

The best part? There was no evidence of other pickers. My secret spot was and is still mine; Matt can be trusted to keep it to himself. A mushroom spot is a secret worth keeping close, and mushroom hunters understand that it is an honor to be taken to another's favorite spot, a sacred trust that is not to be violated.

There are some places in the Blues that hold mushrooms but that are off limits to me — private lands, the Umatilla reservation. Fortunately for us, the National Forests have millions of acres of ground to search for these delicacies, and it is there for all of us. You don't even need a permit if you are picking mushrooms only for your personal use.

My grandparents and mother had their mushrooming spots, I have mine, and our daughter is developing her own. While my grandparents left me their books, their writing and some of their knowledge, they made no maps. Perhaps it is better that way, as I collect my own places to wander each spring.

I encourage others to do the same while the spring flowers are blooming, the sun is shining and the birds are singing. It's a fine time to enjoy our public lands.

Bill Aney is a forester and wild-life biologist living in Pendleton and loving the Blue Mountains.

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