

OUR VIEW

Closing the 'justice gap'

Most tenants in disputes with their landlords in Oregon are not represented by lawyers. The tenants may not be able to afford a lawyer, not realize how much it could help, or a lawyer may not be available.

The Oregon State Bar is taking public comments on a proposal to possibly allow licensed paralegals to provide some legal services in landlord/tenant disputes and also in family law cases. "These are two of the areas of law with the greatest unmet need for legal assistance in Oregon," the state bar says.

The Oregon Supreme Court will make the final decision on whether this would be allowed. But the state bar would like public input. There is more information and the place to provide public input is here: www.osbar.org/lp.

The numbers of Oregonians who do not have an attorney in family law or landlord/tenant disputes are high. It's nearly four out of five. "It's what we refer to as the 'justice gap,' which includes not only the poverty population that legal aid serves (125% of federal poverty guidelines), but also those of modest income who don't qualify for legal aid but still cannot afford a lawyer," Kateri Walsh, the communications director for the Oregon State Bar, told us in an email.

The bar's program would allow licensing of trained paralegals to do that work. Rules and requirements would be created.

In family law cases, for instance, the paralegals could handle dissolutions of marriage, separations or annulments, custody and parenting times, child and spousal support and a bit more. Would it be a better if there was a lawyer involved? Probably. But allowing paralegals to do that work would provide more access to legal advice to more people and at a price more people could afford. The analogy the state bar uses is to nurse practitioners in medicine. They can't do everything a doctor can do. They do enable more people to get better care.

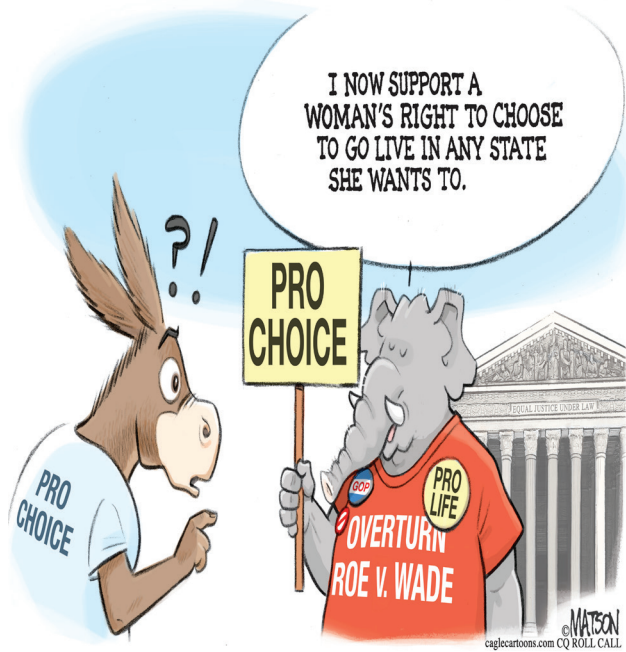
What do you think? Should Oregon do it? Once again, the link for more information and to provide your feedback is here, www.osbar.org/lp.

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Don't listen to the Chicken Littles, River Democracy Act is a win-win



PETER BARRY
OTHER VIEWS

One old rancher I met many years ago said to me, "Humans are a water-loving species." He was exactly right. We all do love cool, clean, fresh water and all the goodness that comes with it.

The proposed River Democracy Act would help protect (though only about 4%) of Oregon's creeks and rivers. Even though it will not protect enough miles of our precious waterways — or give them all the protection they really need or deserve — it is still a step in the right direction.

You might think this positive plan was some kind of horrible idea according to a recent letter to the editor, and the knee-jerk response of a few of our county commissioners. If they actually read the act, they could relax. In fact, it is a great idea. The River Democracy Act totally protects private property rights and flexibility for management, and it also has rules that limit some of the worst kinds of damage to clean

water and fish habitat.

Our Constitution makes it clear: The waters and wildlife "belong" to all Oregonians (and especially to all our kids and grandkids, and to all other species that of course need water too).

No ranches or farms will go out of business or have terrible management burdens placed on them because of this good proposal. The act is very specific about all this. In fact, it will provide money and projects to reduce risks to fire-prone creek-sides and canyons and help rehabilitate them if there is a big fire or flood. And yes, of course it will allow private management and public access where we now have it. Don't listen to all the Chicken Littles out there. This is a win-win.

The local Grande Ronde Model Watershed (led by ranchers, farmers, fishers, etc.) has spent many millions of dollars hiring locals to rehabilitate the most important and degraded creeks and rivers around here. While a few fish are finally coming back, and water quality has improved a bit, we need to keep at it.

Most of us do not even know what a healthy creek looks like anymore, as we have grazed, bulldozed,

logged and roaded just about every mile of stream in Oregon for more than a hundred years. Our streams are full of sediment, cow manure, herbicides, and are much too warm as there are few bushes and trees keeping them cool, or beavers to keep them natural. Not long ago, every stream ran full of crystal-clear water and was full of salmon and other fish. We have nothing like that now.

Yes, we all love our creeks and rivers, and it is our job to restore and protect them. Simple. Speak up if you love streams, rivers, floating, fishing, wildlife — or taking a drink of clear, fresh water out of our valuable waterways.

Ask our elected officials to support the River Democracy Act and pass it soon. A copy of this letter was signed by more than 15 other residents of Northeastern Oregon, of all parties and backgrounds, and sent to our senators.

Peter Barry, of La Grande and Joseph, has lived in Northeastern Oregon most of his life, working in biology with the USFS and as a forest and grassland manager, studying ecosystems in the classroom and on the ground.

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