

OUR VIEW

Public records law needs a disclaimer

Oregon's public records law should come with a disclaimer. It should be like one of those car ads on the radio where after you hear about the deal, the announcer goes rapid-fire through all the conditions that can make you wonder how good a deal it really is. That's because Oregon law discriminates against people on access to public records. If you are rich or have a rich backer, the fees for getting access to public records are no problem. If you are not rich or work for a company that makes slim profits or no profits, Oregon's law essentially says you are not worthy of the same level of access to records that are purportedly public. Oregon's Public Records Advisory Council is developing legislation aimed at improving the equality of access.

Children get public education in Oregon, no matter what their socioeconomic status. You get to check books out of the public library, no matter what your socioeconomic status. But access to public records, that is based on your ability to pay. Of course, a lot of things are like that. It's hard for most people to find the time and money to give a lot of attention to what's going on in local, state or national government and try to influence it. Being rich helps. Being poor certainly does not.

A police report. Details about new development in your neighborhood. Plans for trails along the river. Those are all things the public has a right to. All those things are usually pretty easy to get and at low or no cost.

What if you want records that show the negotiations with a big-tech company over how much water it will use in its new plant in Hood River? What if you want all the records that show how the police interacted leading up to a protest at Pilot Butte? What if you are worried your government is doing something it shouldn't? Do you think getting access to those records would be easy or cheap? Most likely not. People with money would be able to at least try. The barrier of fees would stop some from even trying.

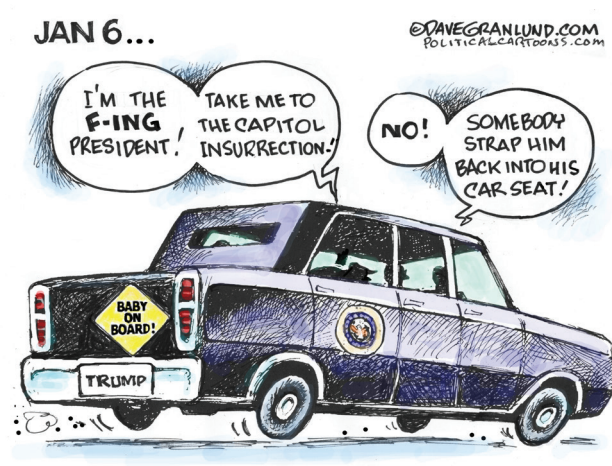
Oregon's Public Records Advisory Council has been holding meetings and listening to testimony about this issue for months. Last week, it talked about what possible legislation might say.

One big change: Requester tiers. The type of requester would change what could be charged. Commercial interests would have to pay for the actual cost of any searching, duplication and review of documents. Media and public interest organizations, educational and non-commercial scientific organizations would have to pay only for duplication. Anyone else, including members of the general public, would have to pay for search and duplication.

One additional requirement that is being considered is no fees for a requester's own files or records. Another is that fees would be waived or reduced by at least 25% if the requester is a member of the media and the request is made in the public interest. There's much more to the proposal than we have listed. You can see a draft in very preliminary form at tinyurl.com/PRACchanges.

A clear outcome of such changes is that costs of public records would shift from individual members of the public seeking information to government, which of course is funded by the public as a whole. It may also increase demand for records because requesters would not have to pay as much. That may increase the burden on government staff with more requests. But if they are public records, shouldn't the law ensure all the members of the public have reasonable access to them?

You can see more about the Public Records Advisory Council here: tinyurl.com/ORprac.



YOUR VIEWS

Private insurance companies never asked what we wanted, needed

Thank you for your editorial of June 23 outlining some questions regarding the Joint Task Force for Universal Health Care. As the editorial points out, there are questions and concerns. Right now, the task force is taking input and questions from us, the public. When did our private insurance companies ask us what we wanted, needed and preferred from them?

Many questions are addressed on this link for the Task Force: tinyurl.com/ORhealthmeetings.

To become involved with solutions: www.hcao.org

Let's put our heads together and come up with the best solution for all Oregonians.

Teresa Smith-Dixon
La Grande

Republicans forcing women to decide between bad options

Well, Republicans have once again reaffirmed to whom their loyalties lie. This time they have ignored the happy, healthy lives of future generations, and given in to the deep pockets

of the oil and coal giants.

Young women will have to live under the umbrella of bad choices or no choice at all, about their lives, deciding if life without choice is really worth living. I have never before in my life seen more hypocrisy than displayed by so-called evangelical Christians, who believe the only freedoms we should have are the ones they think we should have. Liars in the Supreme Court.

I usually don't like to point fingers, but it is apparent now that they have only one goal in mind, and that is to make the entire country believe their way is the right way. It is time to stand up and say no, not today.

I am not an overly religious person, but I believe if there is a God, he meant for us all to choose the way of life we live, right or wrong, follow your own feelings, and suffer the consequences, good or bad.

Don Worley
Baker City

Trump is the only example of fraud in the current situation

Where to start? The Jan. 6 hearings that a lot of President Donald Trump supporters have no doubt been afraid to watch for fear of hearing the

damning testimonies of people formerly loyal to the Donald have peeled back one ugly layer after another about this highly incompetent and abhorrent individual.

A person so un-American that he lets his own personal interests and ego come before the good of the nation. So petty and childish that we can almost feel pity for this man-child with claims of fraud. He is and continues to be the only example of fraud in the current situation.

The ultimate irony is that the only fraud committed came from him and his lapdogs, asking for donations from those still foolish enough to believe in his false claims of voter fraud. Millions given for his phony stop the steal campaign. Money that'll never be used for anything other than to line Trump's pocket.

The Democrats can't even get out of their own way, let alone organize choreographed fraud on a multi-state scale. Stop the whining, come to realize that the inability of Trump to even bring about a scant resemblance of a grown man and admit he lost in a free and fair election is the reality.

There is a sucker born every minute according to P. T. Barnum. Trump's lackeys prove that every day.

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