

OUR VIEW

Let's improve access to our public records

It's one thing to be frustrated with how costs block the public's access to public records in Oregon. That's easy. Editorial writers are good at that.

Figuring out how to solve it is another matter. Oregon's Public Records Advisory Council is working on solutions. Next week it's going to be tackling a host of issues about making public records reform a reality. The policy questions include:

- If fees are eliminated for public records, there's much less reason for people to limit the size of their request. How could that work?
- If media should get a discount for fees, who defines what media is? Is a blogger? Is someone who writes a newsletter for a group?
- If other individuals or groups should get a fee discount because a request is in the "public interest," who decides what is a public interest?

Many records retained by governments in Oregon are not easily searchable. Should that be a requirement moving forward when governments in the state upgrade technology? Related to that issue is that often personal information that is not supposed to be publicly released is commingled in government data with other information that can be released. Should forms and databases be revised to make separating such information simpler?

You can email the public records advocate with suggestions at PublicRecordsAdvocate.PRC@PRA.oregon.gov.

Life is better with Q&As

We like it when government makes government easy to understand. And the state's task force coming up with a health care plan for people who bounce in and out of health care coverage has made it easier.

Staff prepared a series of questions and answers. There's little you can do to simplify the jargon of Medicaid waivers but the Q&A format sure makes the policy issues much more accessible to the public. You can see it here: tinyurl.com/ORBridgeqna.

The state task force is trying to come up with a program to cover about 55,000 people who fall into a health care gap. Their employment status may change and suddenly they go on or off health care, being it the Oregon Health Plan or private insurance.

The lack of continuity of health coverage can mean they are less likely to get regular preventive care or health care when they should be getting it.

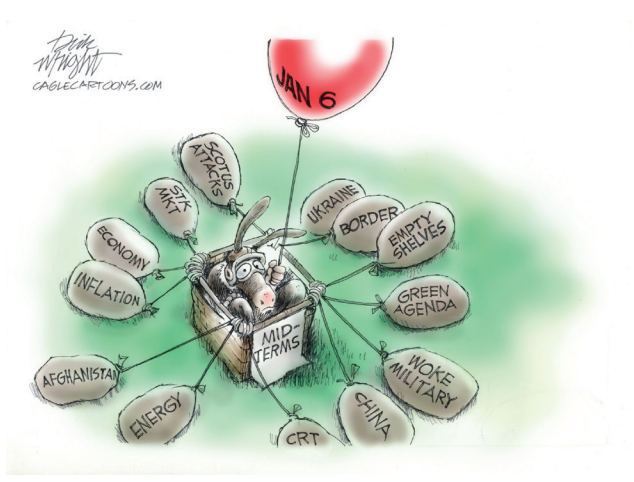
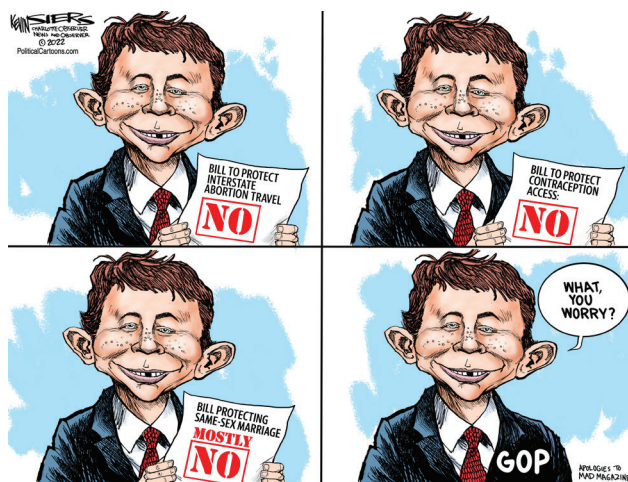
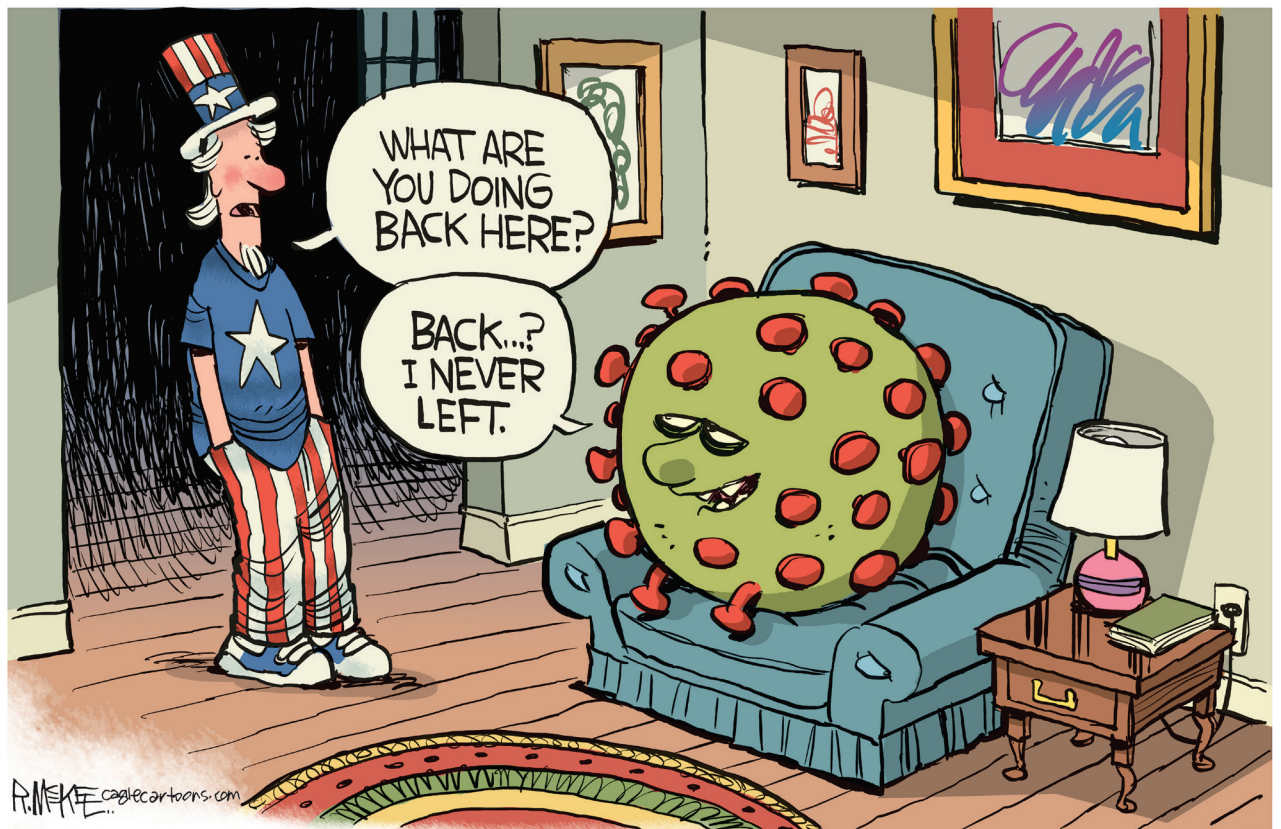
The Q&A marches through what is known about the population, what some of the policy options are and the implications for the state budget. But it puts it altogether in an easier to digest format. Why don't state committees do this more often? We hope they will.

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Address unknowns of joining Idaho



KEN PARSONS
OTHER VIEWS

I read Anne Morrison's Thinking Out Loud column in The Observer (July 9, 2022) regarding Greater Idaho. I would mostly agree with many of her thoughts. However, rather than look at all the negatives, I prefer to look at investigating and answering the unknowns one at a time.

I would recommend that a task force including the county commissioners and interested parties start down the path of seeking knowledge and facts. This is a positive way to proceed so that by the fall 2022 meeting of the Union County Commissioners there will be some local analysis to consider.

Examples of local contacts might include: the Union County assessor, attorney, sheriff and clerk; school superintendents and Eastern Oregon University administrators; and the county office of the Oregon Farm Bureau.

Each would have ideas on how their local "institutions" would be affected by the annexation. Without input from local leaders, we (leaders and citizens) don't know any answers. The problems and positive outcomes

are likely many, but without working locally the possibility of such a transition would be unknown.

Examples of information you seek might include: the impact on taxes; sheriff and deputies need for new certification; compatibility of Oregon ordinances with Idaho ordinances; teacher and/or county retirements; and agriculture business perspective.

I am sure all leaders and citizens can come up with hundreds of questions, but seeking input is a critical first step.

I understand there is an ordinance for you requiring one meeting on this annexation topic per quarter. However, couldn't there be more than one meeting if interest was expressed by citizens or commissioners? Certainly notices in all media (county website, radio, newspaper) will help the community become aware of the reasons behind the potential move, the current process and the many issues that would need to be addressed likely over an extended time period.

Here are just a few of my reasons for dissatisfaction with laws Oregon has passed and other issues that have a negative effect on us in rural areas:

1. Rural Oregonians can't control cougars, bears and wolves in their backyards. All three predators kill baby deer and elk along with ranchers' cattle. City people of course don't want such animals at

their home/business.

2. Urbanites can change farm labor laws, and the farmers are forced to pay the extra costs. And, in balancing the budget, farmers have no control over the income for their crop.

3. Urbanites live in crime-ridden communities and yet have legalized many former illegal issues, including possession/use of certain drugs.

4. Tax burdens according to <https://taxfoundation.org/tax-freedom-day-2019> indicate Idaho has the eighth smallest taxation, whereas Oregon ranks 33rd. I've read that in 2019, Idahoans paid \$1,722 less per year than the average Oregon resident.

5. Prevention of destruction of housing from huge wildfires is more effective in Idaho. Rural areas function better with less regulation, which is prevalent in Idaho.

I have heard from some that even if this move seems like an overwhelming issue, there is hope that the Oregon Legislature might realize that Union County along with several other counties are serious about addressing solutions to the issues above.

■ Ken Parsons, of La Grande, has been a supporter of the Greater Idaho proposal since the beginning. Learn more at www.greateridaho.org.

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