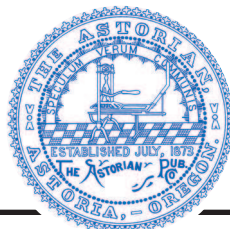


# OPINION



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## OUR VIEW

# Secrecy isn't the answer

Oregon governments must remain fully transparent

It was with alarm that we learned that lawmakers in Salem are actively considering a proposal to make Oregon government actions less open.

And it was with extraordinary disappointment that we learned that the latest move in this direction is being spearheaded by the North Coast's former Rep. Deborah Boone, and recommended by our state Sen. Betsy Johnson.

What on Earth are they thinking?

Public confidence in government is already at an all-time low. But here are two lawmakers who represent us in Salem, signaling to Clatsop County residents that they want to curtail public access to information about governmental decision-making.

Supporters say Senate Bill 609 is designed to prevent people making blanket requests for public records and expecting officials at public agencies to answer them fully and immediately — whatever the time and cost.

We have all heard of occasional examples where a community activist has demanded full reports on some issue and caused an agency considerable time and expense in trying to comply. Often it has been curmudgeonly characters with legal beefs against that agency trying to act as their own lawyers and create a paper trail to win their cases.

However, even those public records requests have been known to unearth government abuses.



AP Photo/Don Ryan

Oregon already allows more than 500 exemptions for public requests for information.

Most public records requests are totally legitimate queries in good faith. They are not "fishing expeditions," as Boone alleges. Instead, they come from members of the public or journalists seeking information about a specific issue.

Additionally, Boone's suggestion that requestors must reveal how the information is going to be used is totally inappropriate. Public records are open to taxpayers. Period. Requesters can paper the wall with them if they want to — taxpayers shouldn't have any such requirement.

Oregon quite rightly gained a reputation some years ago of being the nation's paragon of openness. Other states have consulted our folks in Salem on best practices when considering modifications in their own openness policies.

It is a matter of pride to us that Oregon laws were originally written

on the basis that everything should be public, with very few exceptions. However, this has been eroded away by more than 500 exemptions, instead of just allowing a few very carefully defined, narrow categories.

Thankfully, there are public officials who understand. The Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association and the Society of Professional Journalists, two groups we are closely affiliated with, have honored Northwest public officials who have promoted openness. Some county clerks set superb examples and provide expertise to neighboring agencies on how to interpret both the reality and the spirit of the law.

This ill-considered action is an appalling waste of everyone's time on a non-issue. Any crisis, if there is one, is manufactured. Boone embarrasses herself by admitting that she cannot point to a single specific instance where a broad pub-

lic records request has caused an agency difficulty or expense — she just says it is a problem.

We try to avoid clichés on both our news and opinion pages, but we can think of no better description than "using a sledgehammer to crack a walnut."

Even if the occasional records request proves costly, it isn't a big enough problem to require legislation to tighten access to information from legitimate questioners.

The public in Oregon, whose taxes pay for our government, quite rightly expect to be able to scrutinize decision-making. In making public records requests, citizens are simply asking how their money is being spent. Sometimes — often, in fact — we in the press ask the questions on behalf of the public. That's our function as a watchdog in a democracy, a duty we have taken seriously since the nation was founded.

When Boone announced her retirement from the House, we were complimentary about her lengthy service to the state, first as an employee and later as a legislator representing fishers and other interests on the North Coast. But, over the years, we have been critical that the Democrat has not demonstrated memorable leadership in any one specific bill or law.

If this latest is to be her last act — and her legacy — it will indeed be a sad one.

This is an idea that needs to die. It benefits no one and it hurts everyone. Any representative even considering going down this path needs to stop. Right now.

## LETTERS

### President Trump holding American citizens hostage

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate President Donald Trump on setting some remarkable records. While we are moving into our second month of the shutdown, it should be noted that no domestic or foreign terrorist, or criminal entity, has been able to match the records for duration and the number of people held hostage.

Yes, I said terrorist or criminal. One who seizes or takes a person, and holds that person as security for the fulfillment of a condition. In the last 30 years, the American citizen has been held hostage, according to Wikipedia, on 18 occurrences, for a total of about 242 hours or 11 days, plus or minus. The president is well over 30 days, and is holding over 800,000 American citizens hostage, with the sole purpose of political exercise.

Whether you consider the president to be a hero or a villain, this cannot stand in our country. He has held our families, friends and neighbors hostage to his demands. It is unacceptable, wrong — on so many levels — and horribly injurious to the American citizen and to the fabric of our society.

Get our families and friends back to work, and then finally fix our broken immigration policy with bipartisan effort.

PAUL DUEBER  
Cannon Beach

### Timber management is significant public issue

In a recent article ("Wyden promises to fight for Coast Guard pay, end to shutdown," The Daily Astorian, Jan. 7) the reporter — purportedly summarizing Sen. Ron Wyden's response to two questions about logging and forest management issues — mentioned only that he said he supported the Clean Energy for America bill, that increases taxes on fossil fuel corporations. In reality, the clean energy piece was only a small fraction of Wyden's lengthy response.

Wyden began his answer with an impassioned defense of public lands, condemning Republican congressmen advocating more timber harvest on public land to prevent wild fires. He was particularly adamant about ending clear cutting, which he



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described as a significant contributor to global warming.

When asked about the Oregon Forest Resources Institute's promotion of cross-laminated timber as the next boom to the Oregon economy, Wyden's response was cool. He suggested that it could be a factor in the economy of timber counties, along with other wood products. Wyden also spoke with pride about his efforts to achieve broader protection for wild and scenic areas, such as the Rogue River.

The troubling aspect of the reporting on Wyden's remarks is not the brevity, although in a county where timber management is of significant public interest, one would think it deserved more than a short paragraph.

This reader has seen a growing trend in The Daily Astorian to present only news that is supportive of the timber industry. This may or may not be intentional. Readers will have to decide.

ROGER DORBAND  
Astoria

### Good to have strong and differing opinions

The considerable friction between Bruce Jones and Sarah Jane Bardy should in good part remain. As a community we are very divided over how development

should or shouldn't be allowed to proceed. It's good to have strong and differing opinions on our boards, commissions, and City Council to ensure full representation to all of those who call Astoria home.

However, it can be unhealthy for our community if Bardy and Jones only view each other through the lens of a few topics they are strongly divided on. It's a new year, but it remains to be seen if Astoria has any real newness in it. If I remember accurately, Jones expressed a need for the City Council to focus on a few core things, along with a need to address housing issues, certified daycare and disaster preparedness. There may also be the need to mitigate the local harm being done by the ongoing government shutdown.

It would be good if Jones and Bardy could discover a few things they share a concern or passion for and to find a way to cooperate in those endeavors. Communities are far healthier when people's natural resentments and divisions are tempered by areas and issues of commonality.

"SASHA" ALEX MILLER  
Astoria

### Time to bring sanity back to the White House

As the current government crises continue, more than ever we need to eval-

uate our beliefs as Americans, as well as our faith in government; to review what we want our country to stand for, and what international relationships our top executive should promote.

Unfortunately, our current president appears to be more an aspiring autocrat, seeking immunity from criticism, disdaining diplomacy, and marginalizing his opponents. His governing strategy is to promote chaos and inflame fears of national instability.

To be afraid without reason is intolerable; there needs to be a face to the fear in order to face the fear and gain control of it. President Trump has provided many faces to focus our fear on, while he hammers home his monolithic solution. He has become the face of my fear for the nation's regression into illiberal policies and actions. To me, it is as if a mourning veil has been drawn over the Lady of Liberty's welcoming figure, that her appearance might not rebuke our injustices.

The only way I can gain control over my fear is to participate in one of our democracy's great achievements, our system of free elections, so I will make my voice heard in 2020, and do my part to bring sanity back to the White House and to our country.

SARA G. LAY  
Ocean Park, Washington