

EAST OREGONIAN
Founded October 16, 1875

KATHRYN B. BROWN
Publisher

DANIEL WATTENBURGER
Managing Editor

JENNINE PERKINSON
Advertising Director

TIM TRAINOR
Opinion Page Editor

EO MEDIA GROUP

East Oregonian • The Daily Astorian • Capital Press • Hermiston Herald
Blue Mountain Eagle • Willowa County Chieftain • Chinook Observer • Coast River Business Journal
Oregon Coast Today • Coast Weekend • Seaside Signal • Cannon Beach Gazette
Eastern Oregon Real Estate Guide • Eastern Oregon Marketplace • Coast Marketplace
OnlyAg.com • FarmSeller.com • Seaside-Sun.com • NorthwestOpinions.com • DiscoverOurCoast.com

MIKE FORRESTER
Pendleton
Chairman of the Board

STEVE FORRESTER
Astoria
President

KATHRYN B. BROWN
Pendleton
Secretary/Treasurer

CORY BOLLINGER
Aberdeen, S.D.
Director

JEFF ROGERS
Indianapolis, Ind.
Director

OUR VIEW



Fix Oregon's toothless public records laws

For decades, Oregon's public records laws have been systematically weakened as powerful interests carved out exemptions for data they do not want to share.

It is hurting Oregon. It makes our government less transparent, it gives cover to lobbyists and state employees who are breaking the law or misusing money, and it makes it more difficult for newspapers and private citizens to hold their government accountable.

Take, for instance, just one biased exemption. If you lobby the legislature on transportation issues promoting anything except single occupancy vehicles, your lobbying is exempt from public records laws. Public transportation lobbyists, ergo, are exempt because their close ties with the legislature allowed them to carve out their own special set of rules.

Single occupancy vehicle lobbyists — while probably having plenty of power and funds behind them — haven't greased the right wheels of power long enough to get themselves exempt. But it might not be that way for long. Each year, more and more exemptions are added onto the rolls and special interest lobbyists are always at the top of the list.

Why does it matter? Knowledge of how our government is functioning is crucial for any democracy. It allows us to know how our representatives vote, how much we pay government employees and when someone in public employ screws up.

Clearly, there are things that should be exempt from public purview: medical and health records, Social Security numbers and other personal information.

But the government is our government. It works best when it works openly and works for us.

Current Oregon governor Kate

Brown got the job because John Kitzhaber was chased out by an ethics scandal.

Record requests on Kitzhaber and the role of the Cylvia Hayes, made by multiple media outlets, were delayed for months. Those delays certainly helped Kitzhaber stay in the race and even win the election. It contributed to the state's embarrassment of having a governor resign, and the undemocratic reality of an unelected officeholder running the state for more than two years.

Brown said increased transparency would be a tenant of her administration, but has yet to make any real headway on the issue. Sure, we've got another committee to discuss it, but we've had committees before and they've come to the common sense conclusion: Our public records law stinks. Exemptions need to be chiseled away. State agencies need to be more responsive to requests, and held responsible if they aren't. And a records request cannot be so expensive that a private citizen cannot afford it.

We think the state's creaky public records laws certainly allowed Kitzhaber to be re-elected, and to some extent contributed to the expensive failures of the Columbia River Crossing and Cover Oregon. Had more been known sooner, costly mistakes could have been avoided and state tax dollars saved.

The Oregon Republican Party has made transparency a top priority of the party this year. We think it will resonate with voters, who feel shielded from the real decision making in Salem. But it will take bipartisan action to get anything done.

The 2016 session is a short one. If legislators want to do something that costs little money but has an outsized benefit to the state, they should simplify and strengthen Oregon's public records laws.

OTHER VIEWS



Betraying ourselves

Desperate refugees flee persecution and war, but American politicians — worried about security risks — refuse to accept them.

That's the situation today, but it's also the shameful way we responded as Jews were fleeing Nazi Germany in the 1930s. In the shadow of one world war, on the eve of another, Americans feared that European Jews might be left-wing security threats.

"Jews are not Communists," Rabbi Louis I. Newman of Manhattan noted, pleadingly, in December 1938, trying to assuage the xenophobia. "Judaism has nothing in common with Communism."

Yet in January 1939, Americans polled said, by a 2-to-1 majority, that the United States should not accept 10,000 mostly Jewish refugee children from Germany. That year, the United States turned away a ship, the St. Louis, with Jewish refugee children; the St. Louis returned to Europe, where some of its passengers were murdered by the Nazis.

That is a stain on our conscience that risks being repeated. Some 26 Republican governors are trying to block entry of Syrian refugees. All the Republican presidential candidates say that we should bar Syrian refugees or apply a religious test and accept only Christians.

Gov. Chris Christie of New Jersey says we shouldn't accept Syrians even if they are toddlers and orphans. And Democrats and Republicans voted this week to impede the resettlement of Syrian refugees.

One Syrian family — a man who once ran a clothing store, his wife and their 4-year-old child — were supposed to arrive in Indiana this week. Then Gov. Mike Pence announced that Syrians were unwelcome, and the family is settling in Connecticut instead.

Remember what a Syrian immigrant looks like — the father of Steve Jobs. Thank goodness that when my father came to America as a refugee from Eastern Europe in 1952, politicians weren't fearmongering. My dad sailed to New York, bought a copy of the Sunday *New York Times* to teach himself English, and took the train across the country to a welcoming Oregon.

When Indiana today shuns desperate refugees, it is shunning people like my family. Yes, security is critical, but I've known people who have gone through the refugee vetting process, and it's a painstaking ordeal that lasts two years or more. It's incomparably more rigorous than other pathways to the United States.

If the Islamic State wanted to dispatch a terrorist to America, it wouldn't ask a mole to apply for refugee status, but rather to apply for a student visa to study at, say, Indiana University. Hey, governors, are you going to

keep out foreign university students? Or the Islamic State could simply send fighters who are French or Belgian citizens (like some of those behind the Paris attacks) to the U.S. as tourists, no visa required. Governors, are you planning to ban foreign tourists, too?

Refugee vetting has an excellent record. Of 785,000 refugees admitted to the United States since 9/11, just three have been arrested for terrorism-related charges, according to the Migration Policy Institute in Washington.

If Republican governors are concerned about security risks, maybe they should vet who can buy guns. People on terrorism watch lists are legally allowed to buy guns in the United States, and more than 2,000 have done so since 2004. The National Rifle Association has opposed legislation to rectify this.

Although Donald Trump fulminates about President Barack Obama supposedly wanting to bring in 250,000 or more Syrian refugees, that's preposterous: Obama proposes admitting 10,000 Syrian refugees over a year. That's tiny, just 1 percent of the number that Lebanon has accepted.

The Islamic State is trying to create a religious divide and an anti-refugee backlash, so that Muslims will feel alienated and turn to extremism. If so, American and European

politicians are following the Islamic State's script.

Let's be careful not to follow that script further and stigmatize all Muslims for ISIS terrorism. As a young British Muslim man, Kash Ali, wrote in a post that went viral on Twitter: "I don't understand why non Muslims think we British Muslims can stop ISIS. Mate, I can't even get a text back from the girl I like, and you expect me to stop a terrorist organization?"

Look, accepting 10,000 refugees is not a solution. Indeed, there is a risk that Angela Merkel's admirable compassion will lead far larger numbers to undertake the difficult journey and die on the way. The top priority must be making Syria habitable so that refugees need not flee. This is where I believe Obama has failed — Syria is his worst foreign policy failure — but it's good to see him push back at the hysteria about Syrian refugees.

Helping Syrian refugees today doesn't solve the Middle East mess any more than helping Jewish refugees in 1939 would have toppled Hitler. But it's the right thing to do. Syrians, no less than those Jewish refugees, no less than my father, are human beings needing help, not flotsam.

Nicholas Kristof grew up on a sheep and cherry farm in Yamhill. He has been a columnist for The New York Times since 2001.



NICHOLAS KRISTOF
Comment

Thank goodness that when my father came to America as a refugee in 1952, politicians weren't fearmongering.

YOUR VIEWS

Overcrowded prisons put correctional officers at risk

I am the president of the AFSCME Local 3361 at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution and I would like to respond to some of the comments made about why it's thought opening Deer Ridge is unnecessary. For several years the population of Oregon's prisons has swelled.

The state already released inmates that had less severe crimes like possession of marijuana. Although Deer Ridge minimum was opened in 2007, there were still 1,200 empty bunks that were not filled on the medium side of the prison. The state has done all it could do to house additional inmates at other prisons, so they did not have to open Deer Ridge.

At EOCI, for example our capacity was set at 1,500 inmates before the downturn in the economy and it now has a capacity of 1,767 inmates. This means that most of our housing units have at least 82 inmates with one officer supervising them. We have two dormitory units that now have 107 inmates and still only one officer.

What does this overcrowding mean to safety? When you house that many felons together, tempers do flare. In 2011, there were 205 fights at EOCI with 490 people involved. In 2012, there were 210 fights with 445 people involved. In 2013, there were 218 fights with 478 people involved. In 2014, there were 197 fights with 492 people involved. Most of

these fights have been between inmates, but we have 8 to 10 correctional officers assaulted each year and many more injured responding to and breaking up these fights. No matter what, the medical costs keep going up, which is directly related to these fights.

A recent study showed that 1 in 3 correctional officers shows systems of PTSD and 97 percent have reported witnessing violence, injury or death. Another study found that 34 percent of correctional officers suffer from PTSD. This compares to 14 percent of military veterans. The suicide rate is twice as high as both police officers and the general public. The National Institute of Corrections in 2008 found the life expectancy of a correctional officer after 20 years of work was 58, compared with a national average of 75.

Safety of law-abiding citizens is a paramount, and we work hard to keep the citizens safe. We are often short-staffed and it is not uncommon for staff to be "stuck" (having to work another shift) after their first eight-hour shift. It is difficult to retain staff to work at prisons in Eastern Oregon. We train many new correctional officers and as soon as they get past their first training year, most transfer back to the valley where they can make much more money working for the county.

If Oregon wants to get serious about reducing the prison population, then we need to revisit Measure 11.

Jeff Coffman
Pendleton

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

STAR TRIBUNE DailyCartoons.com

LONDON BLITZ
1945:

ISIS BLITZ
2015:

