

## Quick takes

### Pendleton hunter attacked by wounded bear

Bears can live a long time on adrenalin as we witnessed in Fort Yukon Alaska when a friend shot a 3 year old bear for food for village elders. The young bear ran 300 yards and only when he was being gutted later did everyone notice that there was no heart left only exploded bits. Soo take care.

Margot Gilmore

The animals have no defense when being hunted. It's not a fair fight.

Rose Warriner

Great advice.... NEVER hunt alone! Hmmm, I think I have mentioned that a time or two.

Kathi LoPiparo Segrin

Everybody makes it sound like this was the bear's fault. It was wounded first, that would make me mad too!

Leslee Meador

### Switching genders

I can think of at least 50 things that will harm children and their futures. And not one of them is a transgender person using the restroom of their preferred gender.

Kellye Connell Finch

### Veteran returns to Vietnam

Thank you Skip Nichols, now and your 18 year old self.

EO Reader

One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week's takes. Tweet yours @Tim\_Trainor or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.

# Grasty epitomizes rural leadership

My friend, Steve Grasty, a veteran Harney County judge who is retiring Dec. 31, is now facing a recall vote.

The recall vote has little, if anything, to do with his record of exemplary service advocating for and helping guide one of Oregon's smallest counties — at least in terms of population if not in terms of size. Harney County is one of the largest in America — bigger than some states — and Grasty has been an outspoken and successful advocate bringing attention and resources to Harney County well beyond what would have come their way with a less ardent advocate at the helm. Judge Grasty is respected in Salem for his straightforward approach, his integrity and his willingness to fight for Harney County.

Now, on the eve of his departure from a distinguished career in public service, Grasty is instead going to spend the twilight months of his public life experiencing a prolonged reenactment of the bizarre events that propelled Harney County from relative obscurity onto the national stage.

What are the basic charges? Grasty failed to support the armed takeover of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge by out-of-state insurgents who, according to some reports, caused an estimated \$6 million in damage to a treasured resource and blatantly plowed up artifacts important to the Paiute Tribes while at the same time transforming the community of Burns from a place where residents felt safe and unified into a nightmare of discontent and fear.

While I have had opportunities to discuss the events surrounding the takeover with Judge Grasty, I cannot grasp the full dimension of the threats and harassment



GEORGE MURDOCK  
Comment

experienced by the Grasty family, nor can I fully appreciate what it was like to be surrounded by visitors who intimidated residents and openly provided a threatening presence. It would appear the armed presence experienced by Burns was not unlike representations from international hot spots.

It will be years before Burns and the small communities surrounding it will ever hope to return to normal. The recall effort focused on a dedicated public servant is evidence of the residue that remains.

Like Judge Grasty and many other elected officials, I have deep concerns about federal ownership of too much of Oregon as well as federal overreach, rules and regulation. It is also annoying that those representing states where federal ownership is as low as two percent fail to understand the impact of having so much land removed from the tax rolls.

Conversely, while the concept of taking back the federal lands sounds exciting, it would bankrupt states and counties very quickly. Take, for example, the immense cost of fighting forest fires. Ownership would not necessarily be accompanied by a lack of federal regulations.

Judge Grasty knows the residents of his county depend upon access to federal land to survive. Harney County is the third largest

cattle producing county in Oregon and many of those cattle feed on federal land.

But Judge Grasty also has an obligation to uphold the law and conduct business in a civil manner. The path to resolution of federal grievances isn't paved with armed visitors who turn communities upside down and create divisions that will fester for generations.

While I am concerned about a federal bureaucracy that continues to impose its will upon western America, I cannot condone civil disobedience. And, on a side note, I also believe in honoring a contract with any agency — public or private. As cattle ranchers, our family appreciates the value of pasture and it has never occurred to us that it would be appropriate to withhold our grazing fees.

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Simply put, Judge Grasty is being maligned for doing his job. Those who are not bound by an oath of office have considerably more freedom in doing what they choose.

Fortunately, in the primary election, a majority of Harney County voters seemed to support those who were rational in their response to the occupation. I hope that sentiment will prevail in a vote of confidence for Judge Grasty, who deserves to serve with dignity during his remaining six months in office.

George Murdock is a Umatilla County Commissioner.

## Oregon lawmakers should take cue from Florida's sunshine laws

By JOHN SEPULVADO  
Oregon Public Broadcasting

In elementary school, Franklin Weekley was diagnosed as "mentally retarded." He was slow to learn, but quick to act out on impulse. Teachers at his rural school were unequipped to get a handle on him. Weekley ended up spending much of his time at home. Unsupervised, he would often get in trouble.

Weekley fought with his siblings and raged at his neighbors. He was fascinated with fire and explosives, and was quick to run away in frustration. His parents — who were also developmentally disabled — hoped Weekley would grow out of it.

In 2001, that hope went up in smoke — literally — after Weekley set his family home on fire. The family lost everything, including their son, who was committed to a state-run mental facility as a result.

While in state care, Weekley vanished one day. The state agency in charge of his care would claim the developmentally disabled teenager — who had problems dressing himself — ran to Canada. But around 2004, an attorney heard about the disappearance. That attorney told a reporter, and soon after, the reporter filed public records request with the state agency in charge.

Those records showed that state contractors had found a body in an abandoned building on the property shortly after Weekley's disappearance.

The records showed the body was badly decomposed, but around the skeleton's hips was an elastic underwear band with "F. Weekley" written on the tag. A reporter's investigation found Weekley had run away into an abandoned building and fell down an elevator shaft, where he died.

Shortly after that story was published, the state agreed to pay Franklin Weekley's parents \$1.3 million.

Strong public records laws have the ability to right wrongs, hold state workers — including politicians — accountable, and shine a light into the darkest recesses of government — like the bottom of a derelict elevator shaft on state-owned property. Public records laws help keep things honest.

That was the case in Florida, where Franklin Weekley died. Yet if that were to happen in Oregon, it's a good bet that Weekley's whereabouts would still be unknown. That's because a public records request for a case like Weekley's would almost certainly be obstructed by delays, exemption claims, and high costs.

"The current state of public records is poor to pathetic," said Willamette Week reporter Nigel Jaquiss. "The public agencies

have no deadlines to respond to public records request, so they often do so slowly and incompletely. Some public agencies use their ability to charge whatever they want in a punitive fashion."

Jaquiss, a Pulitzer Prize winner for Investigative Reporting, routinely files public records requests — and he said state agencies often find reasons to block requests because they "fear publication of a story that would be embarrassing."

As Jaquiss noted, there are no deadlines for Oregon agencies to respond to requests, nor are there limits to costs. Even if the agencies do respond, there are more than 500 exemptions to the state's public records laws. And while some of the exemptions serve the public good by protecting the victims of domestic abuse, or shielding state employee medical information, other exemptions include dog licenses, information about boat accidents, and complaints filed by consumers about insurance companies, manufactured homes, and even the state's judges.

In comparison, Florida has four exemptions of public records, there are deadlines for when responses must be filed, and costs must correlate with work performed and be clearly outlined.

Legal challenges to this obstruction are often long and costly, and it creates an Oregon where only those with resources have access to transparency.

While the state's reporters have long complained about the state's open records laws, national research shows Oregon has some of the weakest open records rules in the country. According to the Center for Public Integrity, Oregon earns an "F" grade in the State Integrity Investigation, which measures "transparency and accountability grades for all 50 states."

The state also earns an "F" grade measuring the public's access to information, ranking 34th in the country. For context, Florida is ranked 17th (and neighboring California and Washington ranked 28th and 32nd, respectively).

The Oregon Territory Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists is calling on policymakers to reform Oregon's open record laws. Our membership believes that if it's good enough for Florida, it should be good enough for Oregon. We urge the public to support that reform.

And we encourage all journalists and voters to hold policymakers accountable until that reform is achieved.

John Sepulvado is OPB's Weekend Edition host and a member of the Oregon SPJ Sunshine Committee.



## A cheer for the bison, our new 'national mammal'

By GAYNELL TERRELL  
Writers on the Range

The bald eagle has been the national symbol since 1782, but the Western artist Charlie Russell was right: The buffalo was far more important to the story of the American West.

Congress agrees on very little these days, but this May, it successfully passed a bill that was quickly signed by President Obama. The National Bison Legacy Act designates the American bison, most often called the buffalo, as our first national mammal. What's more, the bill enjoyed the support of a wide array of ranchers, environmentalists, zoos, outdoorsmen and Native Americans. As the Wildlife Conservation Society put it, the animal "is an icon that represents the highest ideals of America."

The story of the buffalo, once roaming in immense herds, also touches on some of the lowest points in American history. As settlers and gold-seekers pushed toward California throughout the course of the 19th century, tragedy often followed in their wake, including the brutal repression and massacre of the American Indian, the wide-scale exploitation of wildlife resources, and the near-extinction of North America's largest land animal, the buffalo.

With notable candor, the National Bison Association's Dave Carter says "the fact that we almost screwed it up" then did not prevent the diverse and sometimes conflicting groups from agreeing on a united effort to help restore the buffalo. The end goal: Everything from sustainable commercial meat production to Indian spiritual revitalization.

In the early 1800s, there were more than 30 million buffalo in North America, ranging in massive



Rodger Mallison/Star-Telegram via AP

A herd of American bison is one of the most popular features of the Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge in Fort Worth, Texas.

herds from Alaska to Mexico. By 1890, only about 500 animals were left. By the early 1900s, there were only about 30 genetically pure animals surviving in isolated areas, such as private ranches and the Yellowstone caldera.

In his book "Last Stand," Montana author Michael Punke depicted the collapse of the buffalo in a sad telling of historical events. This included the scourge of the hide hunters, who sent 1.5 million hides back East in the winter of 1872-1873, leaving the carcasses to rot on the plains. In 1874, the Sharps Company issued the Sharps Old Reliable, "the rifle to end all rifles." Hunter Frank Mayer used one to kill 269 buffalo in a single hunt, shooting from 300 yards away.

Railroads sponsored buffalo-killing expeditions, during which one Kansas man is said to have shot 120 animals in 40 minutes. Passenger trains on the newly minted transcontinental railroads would stop for hours while a single herd passed, and sportsmen took aim. And the rail workers had to be fed. A young man who came to be known as "Buffalo Bill" Cody wrote in his diary that he killed 4,280 buffalo in 18 months to feed construction workers for the Kansas Pacific Railroad. Mercilessly, the U.S. Army

participated in wholesale slaughter of the buffalo. Author Larry Barsness, in Heads, Hides & Horns, chronicles the relationship of the buffalo to North American Indians, and why the Army worked to wipe them out: "Either the buffalo or the Indian must go. Only when the Indian becomes absolutely dependent on us for his every need will we be able to handle him. If we kill the buffalo, we conquer the Indian."

Yet, the buffalo survives, and Native Americans have a big role in the animal's restoration. The Intertribal Buffalo Council represents 63 tribes engaging in, or planning, management to restore buffalo culture, and in some cases to manage herds for commercial ventures, which in turn will aid Indian communities. Executive Director Jim Stone says the new national animal designation is a vehicle that will allow tribes to be "buffalo-centric" again.

People talk about oil and gas as the new buffalo, gaming as the new buffalo. "There's still the old buffalo," Stone says. Stone, a Yankton Sioux, says his South Dakota tribe harvested its last buffalo in 1886. It wasn't until 1993 — 107 years later — that the tribe could conduct another ceremonial slaughter of a buffalo. Stone believes a national buffalo designation resembles the effort to put the image of Harriet Tubman, the Underground Railroad "conductor," on the \$20 bill.

Buffalo, you're the national mammal. You deserve no less.

Gaynell Terrell is a contributing writer to Writers on the Range, an opinion service of High Country News (hcn.org). She lives in southwest Montana.