

OUR VIEW

Tip of the hat,
kick in the pants

A kick in the pants to the Oregon Legislature. There may still be time to diffuse what is rapidly becoming a political Battle of Verdun in Salem, but issuing subpoenas — as the Democratically-controlled House did on Thursday to force Republicans back to the Oregon Capitol — isn’t going to help matters.

Twenty-one subpoenas were issued after Republican representatives — and senators — jumped ship in a boycott of Democratic plans to pass a controversial climate change bill. The move by the Republicans brought legislative work to a screeching halt in what is fast becoming a political tragedy.

The subpoenas theoretically require the lawmakers to appear before the committee on March 5, and to be “prepared to testify about your unexcused absences during the 2020 regular session of the Legislative Assembly.”

“We feel this is within our legal right to ask our colleagues to come back and explain before a committee why they feel it’s OK for them to not do their job,” House Speaker Tina Kotek said Thursday evening.

There is still time to right this foundering ship of state, but it will mean compromise by members of both political parties. It should also mean the climate change bill will be discarded and brought before voters. That may be a tall order, now that individual egos are involved in the success of the legislation, but someone needs to start being the adult in the room and get the 2020 Oregon Legislature back on track.

A tip of the hat to Jennifer McClure Spurgeon for standing as a fantastic example of what a mayor of a tiny town can be.

Spurgeon, who died Tuesday morning from cancer, something she had endured since an initial diagnosis in 2013, was passionate, capable



Oregon Capital Bureau Photo/Sam Stites
Seats in the Oregon House of Representatives remain vacant during a Republican boycott of the legislative session.

and intelligent and set an outstanding example of what citizen political involvement can and should be.

A tip of the hat to Gov. Kate Brown for releasing \$1.8 million in relief money in the wake of the recent flooding in the county. Brown could have held on to state money and used it as political leverage against Republicans, but she didn’t do that. Instead the governor did the right and honor-

able thing by releasing it.

A tip of the hat to the city of Hermiston for its new website on capital improvements — hermistonprojects.com — that adds a level of government transparency. The city didn’t have to create such a website, but the fact it did shows officials want to give local voters as much information as possible.



FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK

Distinctions between press releases and news stories

Small things do matter. Especially when you are working hard to continue to build on credibility and transparency.

While most readers probably don’t see the difference right off, there is a definite distinction between what we call a “press release” and an actual news story. Newspapers sometimes will run press releases. These are generated by independent firms — such as power companies or other major retail firms — and there is nothing wrong with them. They sometimes provide a crucial different viewpoint on a subject and can occasionally be entertaining. At the very least, they are informative about new products, services or new employees. So, they do serve a purpose.

And let’s not forget press releases that can come from state, county or city agencies, such as Oregon State Police, Oregon Department of Transportation, Pendleton Police or the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners. Oftentimes, though not always, those press releases provide details about car crashes that close Interstate 84, notify the public in a change in meeting times, or provide an update on the status of a criminal investigation. All important items and key to producing content for a newspaper.

But they are not news stories. When we do feel the need to print such items, we make sure that the reader clearly knows this was a press release generated by an outside agency. That way there can be no confusion. The reader will under-

stand that the press release was created to sell or otherwise help the firm that produced it. Again, there isn’t anything incorrect about such items. They are simply one viewpoint from a company or special interest group and if we make it clear to the reader, all is good.

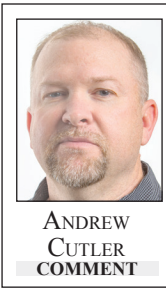
A news story isn’t the same. It is an independently produced piece that is based on facts collected by the reporter. The aim is to produce those facts in an unbiased manner and, in the end, let the reader decide his or her own opinion on the subject matter.

A news story will have the name of the reporter on the story, which means, in the end, that individual must stand by their work. The editors who work up the chain from the reporter also put their skin into the game, so to speak, with the story because they check it. The goal is to produce a story that is based upon facts — not opinion, not slanted — and move on to the next issue.

For most readers, the distinction will seem narrow, maybe even invisible. But for me, as an editor, the difference is huge. It is the difference between presenting a manufactured set of facts — a press release — and a story that is based on facts collected by a reporter.

I think some distinctions matter and need to be clearly articulated to our readers.

Andrew Cutler is the editor of the East Oregonian.



YOUR VIEWS

Cap and trade deserves a vote of the people

Your “Our View” editorial of Feb. 27 offering thoughts about the recent cap-and-trade efforts of the Oregon Legislature missed a very important point. As more than a “democracy,” our democratic republic demands that we the people shall control the process of the making of cap-and-trade law.

It’s not just about our interests, it is about our right to vote — and our right is being silenced by a legislative majority whose sentiments are an imperfect vision limited by the crest of the Cascade Mountains to the east, the Coast Range to the west, the Columbia River to the north and the south end of the Willamette Valley.

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