

OUR VIEW

Oregon makes push for secrecy in government

Sharing someone's personal information with intent to harm them could soon get a person sued in Oregon. A bill in the Oregon Legislature would permit a lawsuit for what's commonly called doxxing.

The bill may help fill a gap in Oregon law. What's worrying is a proposed amendment that would create more secrecy in Oregon government.

House Bill 3047 has more detail than we will summarize here. It ticks off a long list of things it defines as "personal information," including address, email address, phone number, photographs of children, identification of children's school and more. It says if a defendant with the intent to harass, injure or stalk knowingly discloses such information and knew the person didn't want the information disclosed and a plaintiff was harassed, injured or stalked, a plaintiff can seek damages. You can read the bill yourself on the Legislature's website.

One important thing to note: The bill does not specify that the personal information disclosed is or is not already publicly available. So it may not matter if anyone could find the information if they went looking. What can matter is the intent of the disclosure and if the person was harassed, injured or stalked and if a reasonable person would have been, as well.

Let's look at the amendment. Members of the public and journalists can get into battles with government agencies over public records. The proposed amendment aims to expand the list of things exempted from disclosure.

The Oregonian reported the "amendment was introduced on behalf of the League of Oregon Cities." Scott Winkels, the organization's lobbyist told that newspaper: "We were just trying to align the language to what a lot of people in the state had always felt like it meant."

Part of the amendment may do that. It also would throw a shadow over much government activity.

Just one thing the amendment does is exempt from disclosure communications within a public body or between public bodies if "they cover other than purely factual materials and are preliminary to any final agency determination of policy or action." The communications may still be released, but a member of the public might have to go to court to get them.

It's easier to understand with an example. An Oregon Secretary of State audit had found in January 2018 that Oregon's Department of Human Services has been slow, indecisive and inadequate in fixing recurring problems with foster care. In April 2018, the *Bend Bulletin* asked DHS what it was doing to make progress. When the *Bulletin* didn't get a response, it made a public records request for DHS emails connected to the request. It turned out DHS had written up a memo to answer the *Bulletin's* questions. The *Bulletin* only received the request because it made the public records request. Other emails the *Bulletin* received showed that the agency was more concerned with how the information might be seen than informing the public what it was doing. They wanted to hold off releasing anything and roll it into a media campaign.

That's an example of how your state government works. Its priority can be controlling information, not informing the public. And under the amendment like the one to House Bill 3047, we may never have received those emails.

The amendment doesn't simply line up state law with what people think state law says. It's also a move to suppress the people's ability to understand how their government behaves behind the scenes.



The overlooked dangers of cold water



MARC AUSTIN
EYE TO THE SKY

The chilly days of winter are waning and the increasing daylight hours surely mean summer is just around the corner. As temperatures start to climb, people head outside to take advantage of the ideal climate and many outdoor adventures that the Inland Northwest is known for.

Many of these activities are situated on or near the numerous pristine rivers, lakes and streams of the region, making cold water an underrated threat to those feeling those warm afternoon temperatures.

Even on the warmest spring and early summer days when air temperatures rise into the 70s and 80s, water temperatures can stay in the 30s and 40s, meaning the threat of cold water shock and hypothermia is real. Much of the summer water supply for these water bodies stems from high elevation snowmelt.

With a melting point of 32 degrees, it's no wonder area creeks, streams,

rivers and lakes stay rather cold well into the warm season. It also takes water way longer to heat up than it does air, so many bodies of water stay cold through the summer months.

With an increasing number of people recreating around water, the risk of cold shock and hypothermia drastically increases during the summer. Many believe it takes extremely cold water for hypothermia to set in, but in reality, water temperatures need only be in the 50s or 60s. Temperatures are commonly lower than this for many mountain-borne lakes and rivers where snowmelt is the main source of water.

Cold shock occurs when people are suddenly immersed in cold water. It can result in increased heart rate and blood pressure, a feeling of panic as cognitive abilities diminish, and rapid uncontrollable breathing, which may result in drowning if water is inhaled. Hypothermia sets in within minutes of cold water exposure as body heat is rapidly lost.

Water can draw heat from the body four times faster than air of the same temperature. Once your core body temperature falls to 95 degrees or lower, it becomes increasingly difficult to think clearly and use your arms and legs to

swim to safety.

Cold shock and hypothermia can be avoided using some rather simple tips.

First, if you plan on being on or near the water, make sure you have a life jacket or personal floatation device. This drastically reduces the potential for accidental drowning and death, as you can quickly swim to safety if you happen to fall in. If you know you will be venturing into cold water, consider a wet or dry suit to minimize heat loss from your body.

Limit your time in the water to maintain body temperature, and never swim alone so that there is someone who can reach you if you do begin to experience symptoms of cold water shock. It's also best to steer clear of waters you are unfamiliar with, as there may be currents and deeper areas you are unaware of.

Cold water is serious. Treating it with respect and a few simple safety rules will ensure you and your family have a safe and enjoyable summer as you hit the water.

Marc Austin is the warning coordination meteorologist for the National Weather Service, stationed in Pendleton.

YOUR VIEWS

Mismanagement of forests will lead to disaster

After reading the recent *East Oregonian* article about wildfires making an early entrance in our region, I felt compelled to share my opinion.

The statement about local fire officials being already concerned about the fire conditions prompted my response to share another perspective. They might consider the old saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." The millions of dollars that our Forest Service leaders are paid to help prevent and fight forest fires seems at times to be a "gravy train," and politically motivated.

It seems the laws that are made as to what and how fires can be fought on public property are like tying one hand behind the firefighters, because they just might break a rule putting the fire out too soon.

There seems to be a lack of transparency with the "straight-up truth." It makes me recall what my Dad used to say, "You have one man shoveling and three leaning on theirs." He had

a logging company in the 1940s and 1950s. Don't get me wrong, I do appreciate those with the mindset to fight wildfires.

If you notice, you don't see the old mascot Smokey Bear with the slogan "Put fires out cold" anymore. Last fall, we went literally for 9-1/2 hours through the mountains here, just to see for ourselves the incompetent management.

There were places where there had been huge fires that had taken all the trees, which now cover the hillsides with new growth that were so thick. It looked as thick as hair on a dog's back. There was mile after mile with no place to even begin to see through the growth. There had not been any clearing of the floor for as far as the eye could see. There would be no stopping a wicked new fire with the amount of fuel on the forest floor. And you can't see it unless you walk in a ways. It is almost impenetrable.

It is so sad when all the overgrowth hampers the animals and humans alike from freely walking about. Could it be that turning a blind eye is job security?

This scenario is sad and preventable with years of mismanagement of our forests.

Barbara Morehead
Pilot Rock

Kindness to a stranger is a blessing

On May 12, while at the Hermiston Bottle Drop, I had the misfortune of tripping over a parking curb and falling onto the very rough blacktop, suffering a multitude of lacerations — some requiring several stitches and all bleeding profusely. Let me state here that I am almost 92 years old, so you can see that this put me in a serious situation.

A young lady came to my aid and helped me up and into a sitting position, then administered first aid and stayed with me until I was able to navigate again. To say thank you does not seem near enough for your thoughtfulness. It also reminded me that there are still good people in this world.

Roy Drago
Irrigon

EDITORIALS

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

LETTERS

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