

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

ANDREW CUTLER  
Publisher/Editor

KATHRYN B. BROWN  
Owner

ERICK PETERSON  
Hermiston Editor/Senior Reporter

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2021

Founded October 16, 1875

A4

## OUR VIEW

# Accountability remains a key pillar of democracy

Public accountability is one of the most important elements of a democracy, and that means elected officials must never forget they are beholden to their constituents.

Seems like an easy formula to understand, and it's probably so well known a facet of public work in our nation that many take it as a given when reviewing the discourse between elected leaders and voters.

Yet sometimes, for myriad reasons, elected officials will either forget or ignore that time-honored maxim of democracy.

When such events occur, voters need to pay close attention.

Out here in Eastern Oregon, inside small communities, it can be easy to forget the traditional fundamentals of democracy. Inside small communities we are familiar with each other. Often we've attended the same grade and high schools. Or one of us owns a business and we've become acquainted through daily or weekly purchases. When elected to a key local post, it can be easy to forget that roles have changed, and while individuals who hold a public post still are familiar, they now must operate under the rules of democracy.

When a local resident holds down an elected position, the person faces an array of different responsibilities regarding their actions. They work for the voter. They do not get to do what they want to do on their own. They can't simply decide on an action and go through with it and ignore the time-honored procedures and policies of democracy.

Whether they like it or not, elected leaders are governed by an overarching system of democracy that demands transparency. Without transparency, government can — and does — become less of a helpful tool for the people and more of an impediment to liberty.

We understand, and voters should, too, that our elected representatives are truly citizen lawmakers. Almost across the board, the men and women who serve on county commission or on city councils mean well and try to do the best they can for their county or city. They are there because they care and deserve support.

However, such support doesn't mean looking the other way when a local lawmaker uses the shade provided by government bureaucracy to avoid being transparent. When such an episode occurs, the voters must review such actions as serious and respond to them accordingly.

We all want a government that works, is effective and we want our elected leaders to succeed. Yet voters must never settle for a lack of transparency, no matter how trivial the matter may appear.



## What to do — and not do — after a car crash



BLAINE CLOOTEN

ASK AN ATTORNEY

**Q: I was in a car accident. I've seen ads for lawyers who handle personal-injury cases. How do I know if or when I should hire one?**

**A:** Most personal injury TV ads are cringeworthy. But I was reminded of one recently from years ago. An attorney is sitting at his desk, the camera closes in, and the attorney says, "If insurance companies would just treat people fairly, I'd be out of business." I think even people who are anti-lawyer and people who think badly of the personal injury compensation system would appreciate that sentiment.

Sometimes during a consultation, I'll ask what the potential client does for a living and how long they've done it. After they tell me, I'll respond with, "Well, I don't know anything about that. Would you hire me to do your job?"

Because I've got your attention, let me give my free advice for the week.

### 10 steps to follow after a car crash

1. Do not admit fault at the scene. Statements made at the scene can be used as evidence.
2. The other party's insurance company could contact you soon after the accident. Do not under any circumstances give a statement to the other party's insurance company.
3. Seek legal advice early. Accident victims with lawyers generally recover two to three times as much as people who try to deal with an insurance company on their own.
4. File an accident report. State law requires a report be filed if an injury or death occurs or physical damage to a vehicle exceeds \$2,500, or any vehicle is towed from the scene.
5. Report the accident to your insurance agent.

Your insurance company can refuse to protect you if the accident isn't reported promptly.

6. Ask your insurance agent about benefits available to you under your own policy. You may have coverage for car repair, rental cars, wage loss or medical bills under your policy.

7. Cooperate with your insurance company. Refusing to cooperate with your company may cause you to lose benefits.

8. Do not, under any circumstances, sign documents for the other party or the other party's insurance company without seeking legal advice.

9. Promptly seek an examination from your primary care physician and follow your doctor's advice.

10. Save all medical bills and prescription receipts. Make a record of any time you miss from work.

**Q: What legal recourse do I have if I don't like the curriculum my children are taught at school?**

**A:** This is a great question because it required me to do some research.

In my mind, there are essentially two paths: A) The complaint process; and B) The other alternatives approach.

Before we jump into the two paths, it's important to understand the Oregon State Standards define what students should know and what students should be able to do within a content area at specific stages in their education.

Please click through [www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/standards/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/standards/Pages/default.aspx) to read more, and click through the topic areas to read about the standards at each grade level.

The standards drive the instructional materials. The curriculum is expected to align with the standards. The Oregon Department of Education vets materials for each adoption cycle. Districts can elect to adopt materials that are not part of the ODE list, but that, too, requires a local process.

My research indicates the teachers have very little control over what is taught. Teachers have control over

how the materials are taught. In some instances, teachers bring in supplementary materials.

Everything clear so far? Good, let's move on.

### A) The complaint process

I connected with Chris Fritsch, Pendleton School District superintendent, who was helpful in directing me to several resources. It appears the PSD complaint process is similar to other districts, such as Hermiston, Milton-Freewater and Helix.

The PSD policy and administrative regulations for instructional materials are included in the online version of this article. See here: [oregonlegalfirm.com/pendleton-school-district-instructional-materials-policy-and-administrative-regulations](http://oregonlegalfirm.com/pendleton-school-district-instructional-materials-policy-and-administrative-regulations). The form referenced is the last page of the administrative regulations.

One of the key issues in the complaint process is: "Does a teacher's curriculum direction follow the standards for instruction materials? Or, did the teacher bring in a supplemental materials which has not been adopted?" Whether the supplemental materials meets the standards depends on the context and the grade level.

### B) The other alternatives approach

If someone has a fundamental issue with their children's curriculum, that parent or guardian should consider: talking to the school; talking to the school board; running for school board; voting for the school board; and/or consider homeschooling.

Hiring an attorney always is an option, and if you still have questions, I encourage you to seek a consultation.

*Blaine Clooten is an attorney serving Umatilla County with a focus on family law, estate planning and personal injury cases. Questions answered do not create an attorney-client relationship. Facts and law may vary; talk to an attorney for more information.*

## YOUR VIEWS

### Pendleton is quite a place

Pendleton is quite a place. I love this city, but not everyone is as helpful as you expect them to be.

I've had some work done lately by contractors. There was some damage done to the corner of my house, which I believe was done by a contractor's truck being backed in beside my house. Of course the contractors denied it as I assumed they would.

I had the contractor that originally did the work on that corner of the house (which was very recent) look at it to get an estimate to fix the damage, and lo and behold, this contractor not only came twice to check out the damage but in the

end, said he would fix it for no charge. He (and I) did not want the corner of my house looking that bad.

Pendleton is quite a place.

Kelly Marie Brady  
Pendleton

### It's not COVID-19 causing crime spree

Over the past couple of years a new sense of lawlessness has evolved in some large American cities.

Organized groups of people have set upon various retail outlets to commit what amounts to robbery by intimidation. Commonly called "looting" or "smash and grab," these violent episodes

are a scourge on our judicial system. Our legal authorities seem unable or unwilling to stop these blatant crimes against a civil society.

Last week the spokesperson for the current administration, Jen Psaki, blamed COVID-19 for this recent rash of urban crime. Someone should explain to her COVID-19 does not hinder one's ability to determine right from wrong or alter a person's moral compass.

Our defense against COVID-19 is vaccination. Our defense against "smash and grab" is the arrest, prosecution and strong sentencing of those involved.

Bill Eddie  
Bend

### 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

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published.

### SEND LETTERS TO:

[editor@eastoregonian.com](mailto:editor@eastoregonian.com),  
or via mail to Andrew Cutler,  
211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801