

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2022

Founded October 16, 1875

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## OUR VIEW

# State laws on openness need training and teeth

The last thing most people want to do when volunteering to serve on a government committee is break Oregon's public meeting laws.

But the state needs two things. People need training in the law. And there needs to be teeth in the law to ensure people obey it. That's what House Bill 4140 would do.

The laws regarding open meetings in Oregon aren't terribly complicated. City councils, school boards, library boards, county commissions and the like must meet in public. Debate in public. Vote in public. Agendas must be public. They must notify the public there will be a meeting.

Those are the basics. Some things people might do, though, can get them in trouble. If for instance, people on a public committee trade emails back and forth and essentially hold a meeting through email, that might be a violation of the law. And sometimes government officials willfully hold public meetings behind closed doors — or just make mistakes.

That's why the training and teeth of House Bill 4140 is so important. It would provide more training in the law for public officials of governing bodies. It would allow the Oregon Government Ethics Commission to investigate possible violations and impose fines. Any civil penalties would have to be paid by the public officials themselves.

Opponents of the bill have testified they don't like the additional expenses that public bodies might have to pay. We'd argue expenses spent to ensure government transparency should be part of the government's business.

The Association of Oregon Counties, representing county governments, made a curious argument in its testimony. It pointed out the bill would require an expansion in size of the Oregon Government Ethics Commission. And that commission is funded by public bodies. The counties association said "it means that good local government actors would be paying for investigations into bad local government actors, at taxpayer expense." Taxpayers fund all sorts of things that they don't benefit from directly. By the association's reasoning, people who don't break the law shouldn't pay for police investigations?

Another criticism of the bill is that making public officials personally responsible for any penalties could have a chilling impact on recruiting people to serve on boards. Yes, it can be difficult to find people willing to make the commitment. We look at that provision in the proposed law differently, though. It would provide a powerful incentive for people who volunteer to serve to obey the law and the bodies they govern ensure they do.

The Legislature should pass House Bill 4140. The bill actually may not move forward this session. No further meetings are scheduled for the bill. And it's in the House Rules Committee where bills sometimes are sent to die.



## Serving the community without being elected



TAMMY MALGESINI  
INSIDE MY SHOES

While Nick Kristof's hopes to be elected the next governor of Oregon have been dashed because of residency requirements, it is my hope he will continue to pursue central issues of his short-lived campaign narrative. Honestly, I think he's in a better position as a private citizen with friends and supporters with deep pockets to affect change.

And he won't be "distracted" with other day-to-day obligations of being governor. He can take the time to focus on such topics as poverty, homelessness and addiction — several of the key points he discussed during his abbreviated run for governor.

While I've never had the ambitions, pocketbook or connections to run for governor, back when I was young, full of energy and had time I was willing to share, I ran for a seat on the Hermiston School Board. I thought I would have

made a good addition with innovative ideas, a connection with a portion of the community and I was married to an educator.

After I didn't garner enough votes to be elected, I lost interest and focused my attention elsewhere. Maybe my 20-something ego was bruised — I have never run for a position again. Instead, I dove into efforts that didn't require being "chosen" to participate.

In retrospect, I probably dodged a bullet. The first city council meeting I attended in Irrigon as a reporter lasted more than three hours. And a couple of years later, I experienced a similar scenario during a Hermiston School District work session and board meeting.

One thing I learned through this process is I appreciate fellow community members who are willing to give of their time in hopes of making a difference in our community. While I appreciate those who step up to serve, I challenge our elected officials to remember they represent their constituents — and to reach out for public input.

Another thing, that still seems

strange is the Hermiston School District and the Hermiston City Council meet on the same night. Why is that?

In an election night interview on Nov. 6, 2018, Mark Gomolski, who was serving on the school board while running for a seat on the city council, said regardless of the outcome of the race, he would continue to encourage the organizations to find a way to meet at different times so residents could attend both. It also would be beneficial for the two governing bodies, he said, as they continue to partner on projects such as using the aquatic center to host free swimming lessons for students.

"If we're going to be doing partnerships like that, I think we should be attending each other's meetings," he said.

And here we are more than three years later with both groups still meeting at the same time.

*Tammy Malgesini, the East Oregonian community writer, enjoys spending time with her husband and two German shepherds, as well as entertaining herself with random musings.*

## YOUR VIEWS

### Is the wolf policy equitable?

We learned that introducing wolves to Yellowstone destroyed up to 80% of the elk population. Following that, we are now encouraging the destruction of peoples' food and their cultural existence by further encouraging wolves. Indigenous peoples' treaties have hunting rights.

The proliferation of wolves can vitiate these rights and we need not take responsibility for what we have done. Indigenous peoples' culture and religion and the hunt intertwine, as well as access to the health benefits of this nutritious protein.

Rural people with little money who have supplemented their diets and bonded in other ways around the hunt see the ending of this viable and healthy activity. Is the experience of the individual who is eating a piece of jerky they made, the same psychologically, as the individual who is going to pick up their government cheese? Is there going to be a difference psychologically in independence and self satisfaction?

The ability to survive and shoot straight, skills of an unmoneyed rural people, have made us the people who fight your wars for you. Our military is composed of all skin colors of rural people without much money. By feeding this food source to the wolves, access to the skills that made us valuable soldiers is being lost.

The wolf policy is elitist, and the damage that it causes is suffered by the people who live on the frontiers and in the forest, indigenous, and other unmoneyed people. That is not equitable.

Katy Nelson  
John Day

### Get the job done, or don't

If the city management of Pendleton had a T-shirt, it would say, "We didn't actually overspend our budget, the allocations simply fell short of our expenditures."

Confident frugal leadership is the result of remembering you are already equipped with everything you need to get the job done. Leadership is all about

people. It is not about organizations. It is not about strategies. It is about people motivating people to get the job done. You get the job done or you don't. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. Remembering the goal is to do the right thing and get the job completed.

It is not the city management of Pendleton who pays the wages. The city of Pendleton management only handles the tax money. It is the tax paying adults in this community who pay the city employee wages. Hiring a new staff member to do one of the eight essential functions and major responsibilities of the Pendleton city manager is like brushing your teeth while eating Oreos. Where is this money coming from? Is the city manager now a 7/8 position with a deducted salary? Restructuring will require difficult conversations about how the city of Pendleton is managed and how individuals are paid.

Sally Sundin  
Walla Walla

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