

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

No one is above the law

Democracy matters and how our elected leaders conduct themselves even in the seemingly most remote corner of the nation is crucial to the strength of the Republic.

Now, six of seven Boardman City Council members are under investigation by the Oregon Government Ethics Commission for violations of executive session provisions under the state's public meetings law. Executive sessions — closed door meetings of local lawmakers — are regulated with certain provisions under Oregon law. For example, local elected leaders can't just decide out of the blue to meet together out of public view and then vote on a specific issue. An executive session is held under strict guidelines and while lawmakers can discuss or debate, they cannot vote. That must be done in public.

On the face of it, a minor violation of the executive session proviso of the public meetings law could appear to be much ado about nothing. Truth is, though, any violation of the state's public meetings law, however minor, is serious.

That's because our nation is built upon a foundation of openness and Oregon has led the way for decades in a concerted effort to promote transparency with elected leaders and government. Sometimes — especially in rural areas — local lawmakers are not as enthusiastic about such openness as they should be. There can be a tendency to believe, as an elected leader, that a mandate has been issued during the election and they can do what they want.

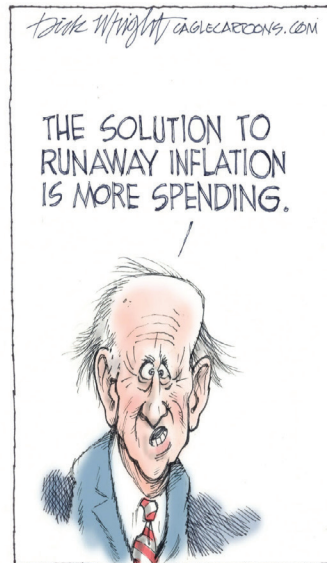
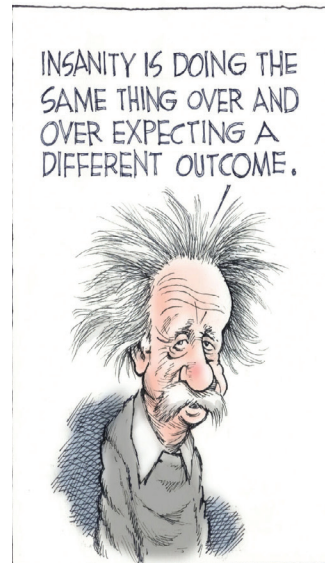
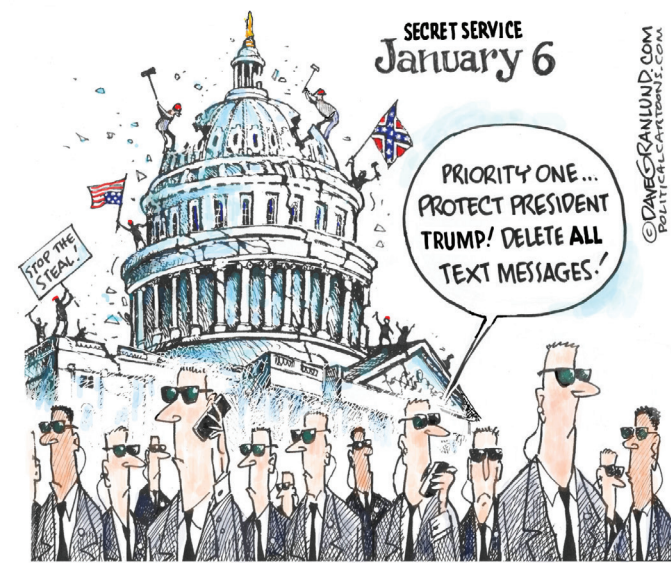
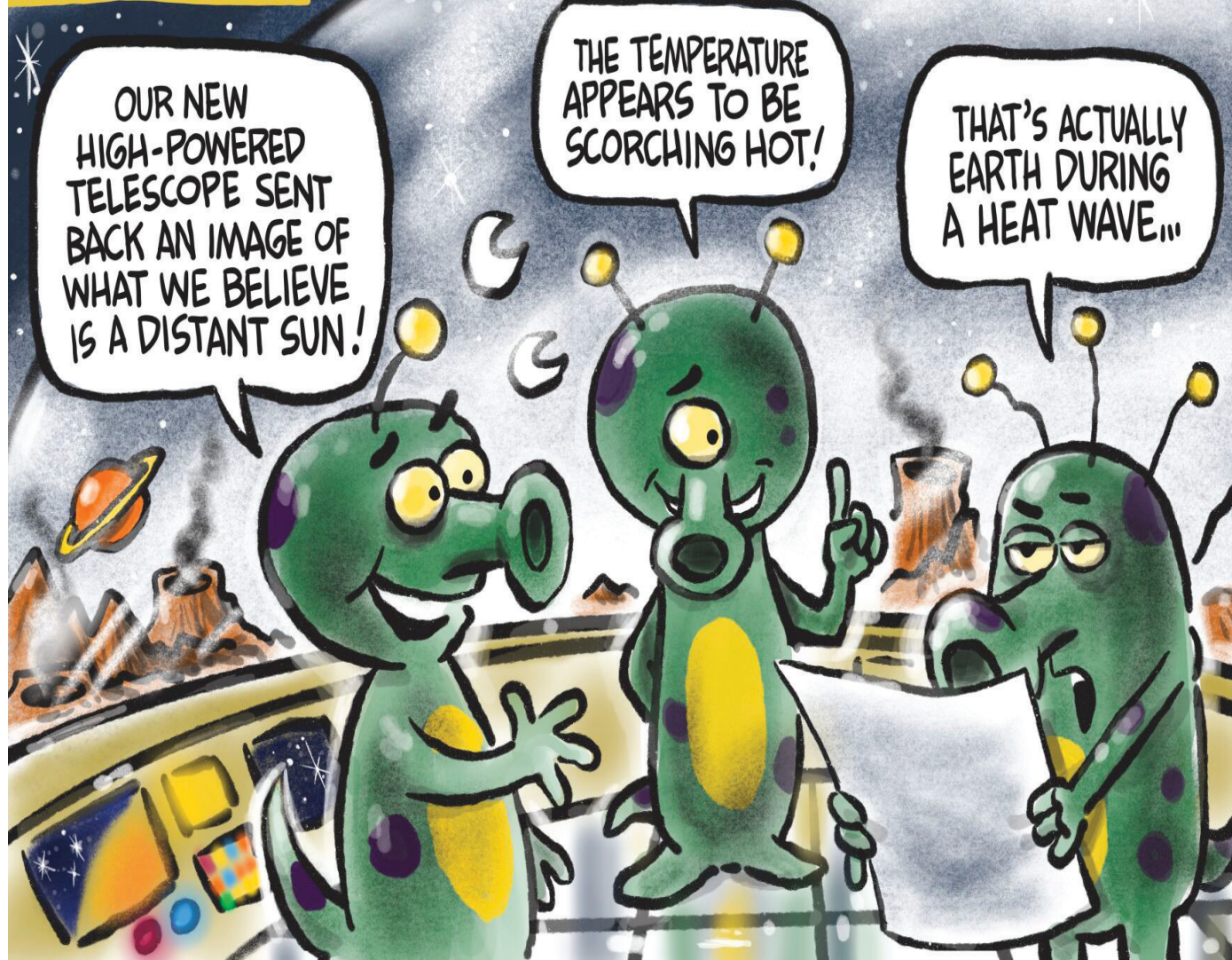
That's not how democracy works. And it isn't how Oregon law works.

Why is such a seemingly minor issue as open and transparent public meetings of local elected leaders a big deal? Because when voters elect someone to an office, they are bestowing, or delegating, to them the responsibility to be stewards of public money. Your money. Those who are elected do not get a free pass to do whatever they choose. They are beholden to the people, to the voters. When the law is not followed that sends the message to voters those who have been elected cannot be trusted.

Hopefully the dust up with the Boardman City Council will be easily resolved and can evolve into a teaching moment for rural lawmakers. After all, we want to support our local elected leaders and believe, generally, they have the best interest of their community at heart.

But they must follow the law. Regardless of their personal opinions.

MEANWHILE, ELSEWHERE IN THE UNIVERSE...



YOUR VIEWS

Let's stand up for Melissa Lindsay

I write this letter after just leaving another funeral meal that Melissa Lindsay is organizing. This may be the 10th one that I have observed her helping the families that need help. I see her everywhere doing this. That is the person that she is.

My thought as I pass the people manning the tables to spread half-truths and misinformation so that they can waste our county's resources on an unnecessary recall action, is that I have never seen them helping, organizing or volunteering. This may be why they have time to do this horrible thing. I say horrible because it is unfair and presents an inaccurate picture.

As a long-time resident of our community, I have witnessed the hard work Melissa Lindsay has undertaken to assist the efforts of our local organizations. I can speak for Heppner Day Care. She approached Amazon regarding its community outreach program and directed them to this struggling nonprofit. Her efforts brought Heppner

Day Care enough money to reopen after the pandemic, but to also improve staffing and many programs. She encouraged them to apply for pandemic relief funding and other available dollars that helped to continue operations.

The Heppner Community Foundation also was a recipient of her encouragement. As a board member I can say that opening the Gilliam and Bisbee Building weeks before the coronavirus shut us down was discouraging. Melissa found ways for this organization to find funding to finish the projects and offer a valuable gathering spot for our area residents. I hope that the people that have benefited from this spot remember that Melissa is a key factor that made it is available for us.

Funerals, weddings, proms, so many things have been celebrated there. None of these things would have been possible without the foresight of Melissa Lindsay.

This is just the beginning of my list of reasons that we need to fight against this horrible injustice to one of our best residents. I hope that many of you think back — have you been touched by the day care, preschool (children, grandchildren?)

Have you had a reason to use or attend an event at the Gilliam and Bisbee Building? If yes, then please stop and thank Melissa. Let's stand up for the person that has helped so many. We truly need people like her, here.

Kim Cutsforth
Heppner

Thank you for publishing letters like these

I loved reading the three letters in the "Your Views" section of the East Oregonian last Saturday, July 16. Each was thoughtful, well written, and in my view positive.

Hal McCune's letter provided insights on our current political divide, Michael Minthorn's support of Joe Yetter for Congress based on the answer to his question regarding financing was well answered and Bertha Keith's thanks for support from strangers in her time of need was beautiful.

Thank you, EO, for publishing letters like these.

Barbara Clark
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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.

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