

# Standing up to public records bullies

This was supposed to be an age of transparency. The nexus of education, democracy and technology should be creating an environment in which public information is widely available to everyone.

But the world seems to be getting more opaque. As conspiracy theory websites grow in popularity and are given increasing credence despite an absence of fact, traditional media is increasingly denied access to the hard data that reliable reports are based on. And sensing the upper-hand, government has become more aggressive about shutting down public record releases and whistle blowers.

**EDITORIAL**  
*Voice of the Chieftain*

A perfect example of this obstructionist behavior by a government agency came up in Eastern Oregon last week.

The Malheur Enterprise, a weekly newspaper in Vale, published a detailed report about a con man who avoided prison time by feigning insanity. The Oregon Psychiatric Security Review Board discharged Anthony Montwheeler last year, and less than a month later he was accused of kidnapping and killing his ex-wife, fleeing police and crashing into a married couple on their way to work, killing the husband.

What would have made the report even more complete is documentation detailing Montwheeler's mental evaluations — documents that were used as evidence at hearings of the Security Review Board. When the board refused to release the records to the Enterprise, the paper appealed the decision to the Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum, who ruled the documents should be turned over.

Instead of complying, the Security Review Board has sued the small paper to keep the records secret. To that end, they are spending taxpayer dollars on a \$400-an-hour lawyer to argue the case in court.

These records are critical, and they should be made public. They show what state officials knew — and didn't know — as they ruled that Montwheeler should be released. They will put hard facts in the hands of citizens and hold those in power accountable.

But this is about more than Anthony Montwheeler, the Malheur Enterprise and the Security Review Board. This is about beating back the brazen attempts of government agencies to obscure the truth. The balance is tipping in their favor already, and if those officials are allowed to shut out and intimidate by reaching into the deep pockets of taxpayers, we can all expect less access and truth in the future.

In our opinion, the Enterprise is exactly the right rural weekly for this fight. Owners Scotta Callister and Les Zaitz have deep backgrounds in rural journalism and aren't intimidated by bureaucracy or obstinance. Zaitz, a former Oregonian reporter, told us Monday the paper has received an outpouring of support from people "offended by the legal mismatch."

The paper has set up a legal defense fund through the Oregon Newspaper Foundation.

Donations ranging from \$10 to \$1,000 have been recorded, and there are hopes to receive \$20,000 by the end of the month to enter the fight on more even ground.

Zaitz said this case is a chance to underscore the importance of public access into what the government is doing. And he is hopeful it will cultivate an environment in which real reform is possible.



# 'Let it snow' ... no, it must go

We have been continuing our exploration of Wallowa County over the past week, and it has been a pleasant adventure. We have met so many terrific people who have welcomed us with open arms.

Saturday morning we drove through the snow to Joseph and had breakfast. It was great. Then we walked around town until we were cold and headed back to the warmth of the car.

Later in the day, we headed up to Wallowa for the Spring Fling and rummage sale. We met several avid readers, and even one who once lived in the same part of Colorado as we did.

Although we were still stuffed from breakfast, the ham and bean soup looked and smelled terrific. We did partake of fry bread, however. It was great.

Sunday we decided to get adventurous and headed north on Hwy. 3 to Lewiston. Yikes.

Now mind you, having lived in Colorado, we are somewhat accustomed to narrow and winding roads. We lived 30 minutes from Red Mountain Pass (11,000 feet) and had driven the road from Ouray to Silverton a number of times.

The Lewiston road is like Red Mountain Pass times 50. It seemed as if it would never end.

After a brief sojourn in Lewiston, we headed back through Walla Walla and came down Hwy. 204. There is still an incredible amount of snow above Elgin.

We arrived home Sunday night tired but with the realization we had seen



**WAHL TO WALL**  
Paul Wahl

some of the most beautiful territory in the country.

Getting up Monday morning to more snow wasn't quite what we expected, although we've been warned to expect the unexpected weather-wise in this area.

Having grown up in North Dakota, I am somewhat familiar with snow lingering until well into April and beyond. I recall a couple time when snow fell on July 4.

Then we lived in Minnesota for nearly 20 years, another area where snow is common for months on end, especially in the northern part of the state.

So you add an extra layer of clothing, and life goes on.

We were encouraged Saturday to see the snow didn't keep folks at home much. Minnesota was that way. No matter how big the blizzard whirling around outside, people were out shopping and eating, cross-country skiing and just going about life in general.

By far the best efforts to remove snow from roadways and other surfaces we found in Minnesota. We have a good friend who works in the snow plowing division of one of the larger Minneapolis suburbs.



Chief Joseph stood bravely against the snow that fell Saturday morning in Joseph and across the county.

Those folks engage in all-out war with snow their sworn enemy, and they don't stop until every last flake is moved and disposed of properly. If it took 14 consecutive hours behind the wheel of a plow, so be it. It's what you do when you're under attack by Mother Nature.

I fully expected the daffodils in our front yard to be a wrinkled mess by Monday morning, but there they were, yellow and fresh.

I suspect summer will make an appearance before long, and after this past winter, we're all looking forward to that.

Wahl is the editor of the Wallowa County Chieftain and is looking forward to eating on the patio without gloves.

# Branding season best of times

My favorite time of year has rolled around, branding season. This is the time of year when ranch families get together and help each other brand calves and process cattle.

Calves are branded, immunized and wormed after their mothers have gone through their annual immunization and worming. The occasions are fun and festive with a barbecue part of the fiesta. In old California, the owners of large land grants would travel from rancho to rancho to brand, and it was usually a several day fandango at each place. Today they carry on the tradition in a smaller way on the Rancho Visitadores trail ride. The ride starts in Santa Ynez and each night is spent at a different ranch where they team rope or team pen for a couple of hours before cocktails and barbecue. Similar rides are conducted in Arizona in the winter and have proven to be very popular.

While in California in February, I participated in a branding at Dan Erickson's. Most of the brandings there are in the fall and are usually wrapped up by Christmas. Dan's was a little late since he calves a little later than most. The Erickson's family ranch is in what's left of the California grasslands and the cattle are



**OPEN RANGE**  
Barrie Qualle

summered in the Yosemite high country.

The calves are branded a little later than here and are therefore bigger. This means the calves are all headed and heeled. Most of the calves here are heeled and dragged to the fire.

Until I moved to this county I couldn't afford to buy a finished horse and had to buy a green broke colt or raise and start my own horse. I always enjoyed starting a colt. You get a great sense of accomplishment as the colt begins to understand what you want as the training progresses.

There are periods when the learning plateaus and it is basically repetition, but then there are those leaps of understanding when the colt finally figures out what you want and responds. The toughest thing for a colt is to figure out what the heck you are after with all the pulling and spurring that is going on. A lot of the process is common sense, and the toughest thing for a trainer is determine when to go to the

next step. I read what Tom Dorrance wrote about training horses. I had a tough time really understanding what he was saying exactly. What I did get from reading his book is the idea of common sense and what your colt might be thinking. Tom was born and raised in Wallowa County and became world famous as a horseman. The term "horse whisperer" was coined and applied to him.

One of his students, Ray Hunt, also became quite famous for teaching people about horses. Since them, there have been a bunch of others that have defined themselves as horse whisperers, and you would think they invented it all. The truth is, they are just parroting what Tom Dorrance from Wallowa County taught them.

My wife's godfather and uncle, Frank Freitas, was probably the greatest horseman I knew. Frank always rode a horse that was good-looking, pretty snappy and broke to death. Frank and his brother owned a large ranch called the Kesterson that ran along the San Joaquin River from Los Banos to Gustine, Calif., a distance of close to 30 miles.

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# There's help if you have Parkinson's

April is Parkinson's Awareness Month. Since Michael J. Fox, Muhammad Ali and Linda Ronstadt have shared their stories, most people have heard of Parkinson's disease (PD).

But they usually think that tremor is the only symptom. Here are other problems that are common:

- Muscular: stiff muscles, difficulty standing, difficulty with bodily movements, involuntary movements, muscle rigidity, problems with coordination, rhythmic muscle contractions, slow bodily movement or slow shuffling gait.
- Whole body: fatigue, dizziness, poor balance or restlessness

## LETTERS to the EDITOR

- Cognitive: amnesia, confusion in the evening hours, dementia, or difficulty thinking and understanding.
  - Sleep: early awakening, nightmares, or restless sleep.
  - Speech: impaired voice, soft speech, or voice box spasms.
  - Mood: anxiety or apathy.
  - Nasal: distorted sense of smell or loss of smell.
  - Facial: jaw stiffness or reduced facial expression.
- Also common are blank stare,

constipation, daytime sleepiness, depression, difficulty swallowing, drooling, falling, fear of falling, limping, loss in contrast sensitivity, neck tightness, small handwriting, trembling, unintentional writhing or weight loss

If you or someone you love has Parkinson's, consider joining us at one of our Wallowa County Parkinson's Support Group meetings, meant for anyone interested in sharing, caring and learning more about Parkinson's and how to support one another living with or someone we love with the condition.

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