

OPINION

VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

Another push in Oregon government for more secrecy

Sharing someone's personal information with intent to harm them could soon get you 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 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."

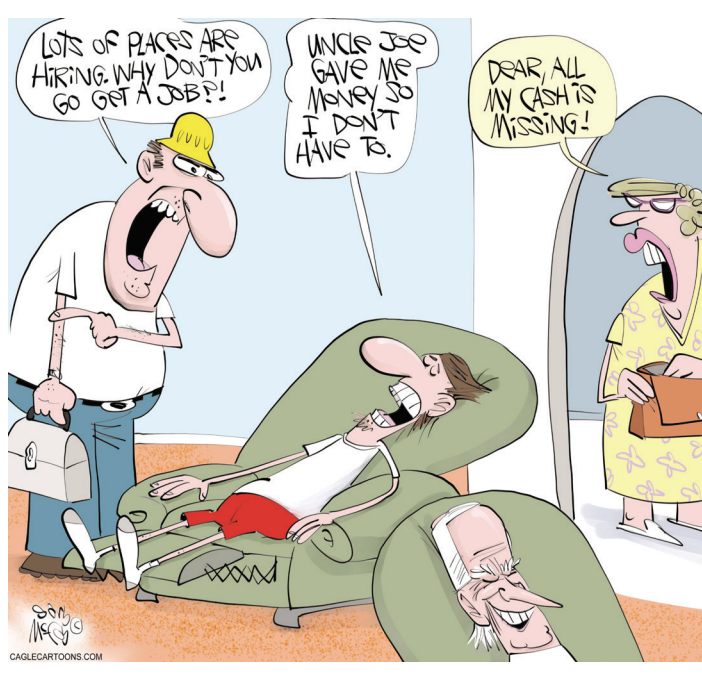
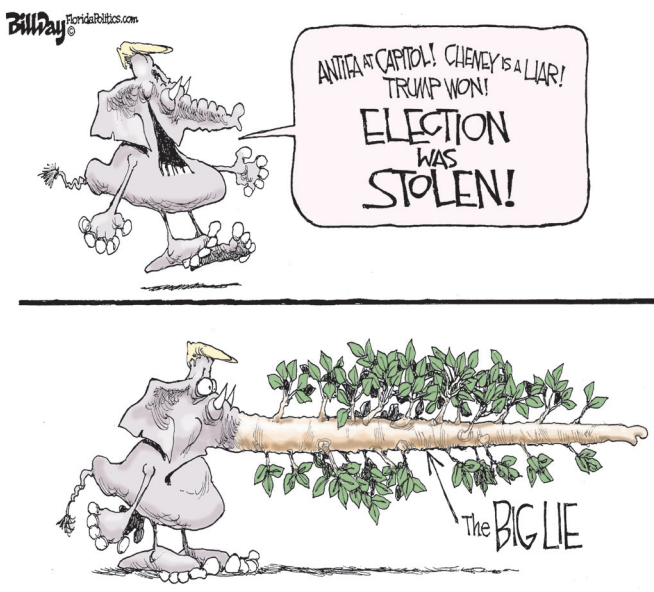
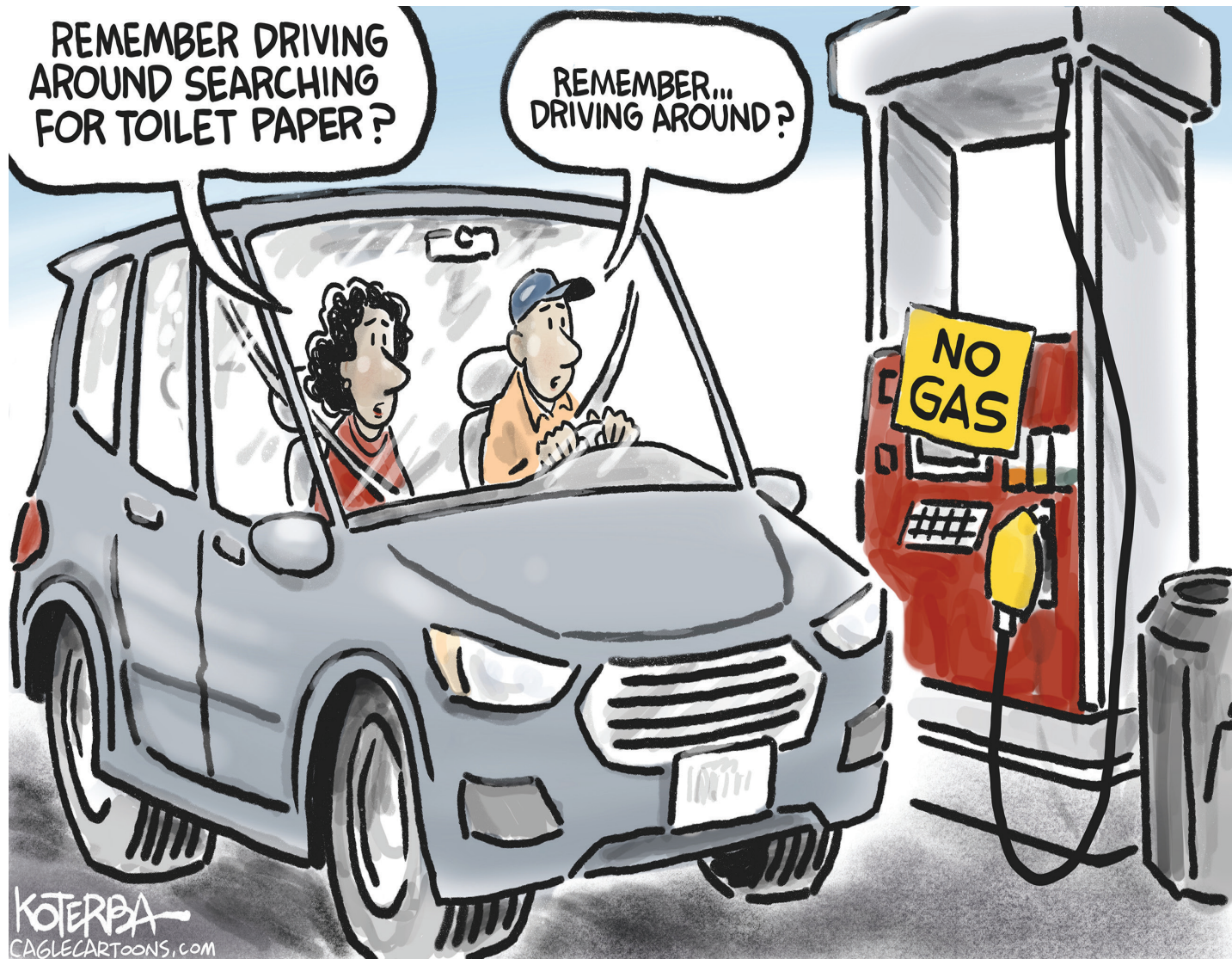
Part of the amendment may do that. It also would throw a shadow over much government activity.

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 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 Bulletin* in Bend asked DHS what it was doing to make progress. When the paper didn't get a response, it made a public records request for DHS emails connected to our request. It turned out DHS had written up a memo to answer the questions. *The Bulletin* only ever received the memo because of the public records request. Other emails the paper received showed the agency was more concerned with how the information might be seen than informing the public what it was doing. It 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 such as 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.



LETTER to the EDITOR

Support for improvements to cemetery appreciated by all

As Memorial Day Weekend approaches and families have a long weekend to enjoy spring outings, we also turn our thoughts to those who gave their lives for our freedom. The *Chieftain* gives excellent coverage of the military observances at Wallowa County cemeteries honoring our military heroes preceded by the schedule of each ceremony for those wishing to attend.

This is also the time of year that the Friends of Enterprise Cemetery appeal for donations that bridge the gap of an outdated tax base and the actual expense of operating and improving this cemetery. It is with deep appreciation that so many have been instrumental in meeting the original goal of a green, manicured cemetery. Many other improvements have been realized by this generosity.

Our groundskeeper and volunteers do a great job of mowing the grounds and trim around and in between each stone

where mowers cannot reach. As a gentle reminder, the upkeep of the stones are the responsibility of the families. Dirt and moss can obscure the etching on stones, especially those that are flat.

Outstanding support the past six years for the improvements to Enterprise Pioneer Cemetery is appreciated by all. Best wishes for a safe Memorial Day Weekend.

Ella Mae Hays
Friends of Enterprise Cemetery
Newberg

CONTACT your REPRESENTATIVES

U.S. PRESIDENT

Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500
Comments: 202-456-1111

U.S. SENATORS

Ron Wyden
221 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-5244
La Grande office: 541-962-7691

Jeff Merkley
313 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-3753
Pendleton office: 541-278-1129

U.S. REPRESENTATIVE

Cliff Bentz
1239 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-6730
Medford office: 541-776-4646

GOVERNOR

Kate Brown
160 State Capitol
900 Court Street
Salem, OR 97301-4047
503-378-4582

REPRESENTATIVES

Bobby Levy, District 58
900 Court St. NE, H-376
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1458
Rep.BobbyLevy@state.or.us

Greg Smith, District 57
900 Court St. NE, H-482
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1457
Rep.GregSmith@state.or.us

SENATOR

Bill Hansell, District 29
900 Court St. NE, S-423
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1729
Sen.BillHansell@state.or.us

EDITORIALS: Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the Wallowa County Chieftain editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the Wallowa County Chieftain.

LETTERS: The Wallowa County Chieftain 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@wallowa.com, or via mail to Wallowa County Chieftain, 209 NW 1st St. Enterprise, OR 97828