

Cottage Grove Sentinel
 116 N. Sixth St.
 Cottage Grove, Ore. 97424

Opinion

The First Amendment
 Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

"I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." —Thomas Jefferson (1800)



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Letters to the Editor Policy

The Sentinel welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level. Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received. Letters that are anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or without documentation will not be published. Letters containing poetry or from outside The Sentinel readership area will only be published at the discretion of the editor.

Political/Election Letters:

Election-related letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large. Letters must: 1) Not be a part of letter-writing campaigns on behalf of (or by) candidates; 2) Ensure any information about a candidate is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay; and 3) explain the reasons to support candidates based on personal experience and perspective rather than partisanship and campaign-style rhetoric. Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes; this constitutes paid political advertising. As with all letters and advertising content, the newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher, general manager and editor, reserves the right to reject any letter that doesn't follow the above criteria.

Send letters to:
 nhickson@cgsentinel.com

When a governor undermines her own transparency

(Editor's Note: Viewpoint submissions on this and other topics are always welcome as part of our goal to encourage community discussion and exchange of perspectives.)

Open, accessible and accountable government with freedom to public information without interference from governing bodies — or elected officials — is essential to our democratic republic.

But that fundamental value may be at stake in Oregon, where the newly appointed Office of the Public Records Advocate under the Oregon Public Records Advisory Council, Ginger McCall, resigned under duress this week, claiming pressure and interference from Gov. Kate Brown's senior staff.

What is happening in Oregon is particularly alarming. A handful of states have offices of "open government," intended to act as mediators of public record disputes. These government agencies are diverse in the services they provide and the powers they possess. Many are established to operate as inde-

pendent bodies unobstructed by the executive branch and legislature. We're now seeing in Oregon that the wall may only exist in enabling legislation — not in practice.

Oregon's legislation to create McCall's office was largely modeled after Connecticut legisla-

GUEST VIEWPOINT
By Daniel Bevarly
Executive Director,
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tion that created the Connecticut Freedom of Information Commission. In Connecticut, the FOI Commission is housed within the executive branch, but not under the office of the executive (governor).

Its director reports to the commission's board of directors to avoid conflict and interference and to keep it an independent agency. But Oregon deviated from the Connecticut model in the placement of its open government office. Instead, it is under the office of the governor with oversight from her and

from her staff, creating an environment for possible political, personal and legal conflict — diminishing its ability to ensure transparency and accountability.

The National Freedom of Information Coalition, a national network of state open government groups, believes these offices for open government ombudspersons are critically important for ensuring accountability and responsive practices in state and local governments.

Yet their effectiveness as transparency advocates relies on their ability to remain independent and without interference from the public agencies and the public officials they work alongside.

In light of these developments, will leaders in Oregon make the Office of Public Records Advocate truly independent, enabling unfettered mediation of public records disputes, or will they choose secrecy and politicization of transparency?

That's yet to be seen. But we'll be watching.

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