

EDITORIALS

Transparency helps public trust officials

Transparency in our elections, our government, and our democracy doesn't just happen. It's hard work. It takes funding. It needs staff. Perhaps most of all, it takes an understanding that the value of transparency can't be measured as an immediate return on investment.

Transparency can nurture a culture of trust in our elected representatives, further an understanding that government serves important functions for citizens, and provide a measure of accountability. When the flow of information about our elections, our government, and our democracy is curtailed, we're nurturing a culture of mistrust and cynicism.

Sadly, a budget subcommittee in Montana did just that recently when it took aim at the state political practices commissioner's office — the office that educates candidates about how to lawfully campaign, and helps them understand the laws governing campaign finances and ethical expectations. The office that compiles campaign disclosure reports from hundreds of candidates each election cycle, and asks candidates to fill out forms properly and in a timely manner. The office that informs the press and public about who is funding the campaigns of the candidates who, if elected, will spend taxpayer money. The office where citizen accountability interests are nurtured.

For doing this important job, for creating "some tremendous efficiencies," as one committee member noted, the subcommittee voted to cut the in-house attorney who helped eliminate a case backlog, and reduce the salary of the commissioner by 23 percent. The vote was along party lines.

Nurturing the public's interest in transparency and accountability was trumped by party politics.

Sadly, what happened in Montana isn't an anomaly. In state after state, lawmakers are targeting disclosure agencies.

In the face of tight budgets, it's easy for lawmakers to argue for cutting ethics and disclosure commissions. But the citizenry should be alarmed when politics trumps the public's right to meaningful information about its elected representatives and who supports their campaigns. The public should be outraged when lawmakers directly attack transparency, for with no transparency there can be no accountability.

By Edwin Bender, Executive Director
National Institute on Money in State Politics

PUBLIC AGENDA

Public Agenda is a listing of upcoming meetings for governmental and nongovernmental agencies in Polk County. To submit a meeting, send it at least two weeks before the actual meeting date to the *Itemizer-Observer* via fax (503-623-2395) or email (kholland@polkio.com).

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18

- **Polk County Board of Commissioners** — 9 a.m., Polk County Courthouse, 850 Main St., Dallas. 503-623-8173.
- **Monmouth Planning Commission** — 7 p.m., Volunteer Hall, 144 S. Warren St., Monmouth. 503-838-0722.

THURSDAY, MARCH 19

- **Polk County Fair Board** — 8 a.m., Polk County Fairgrounds and Event Center, Main Building, Meeting Room No. 2, 520 S. Pacific Highway (99W), Rickreall. 503-623-3048.
- **Dallas Economic Development Committee** — Noon, City Hall, 187 SE Court St., Dallas. 503-831-3502.
- **Independence Parks and Recreation Board** — 6 p.m., Independence Civic Center, 555 S. Main St., Independence. 503-838-1212.
- **Monmouth Arts and Culture Commission** — 7 p.m., Volunteer Hall, 144 S. Warren St., Monmouth. 503-838-0722.

MONDAY, MARCH 23

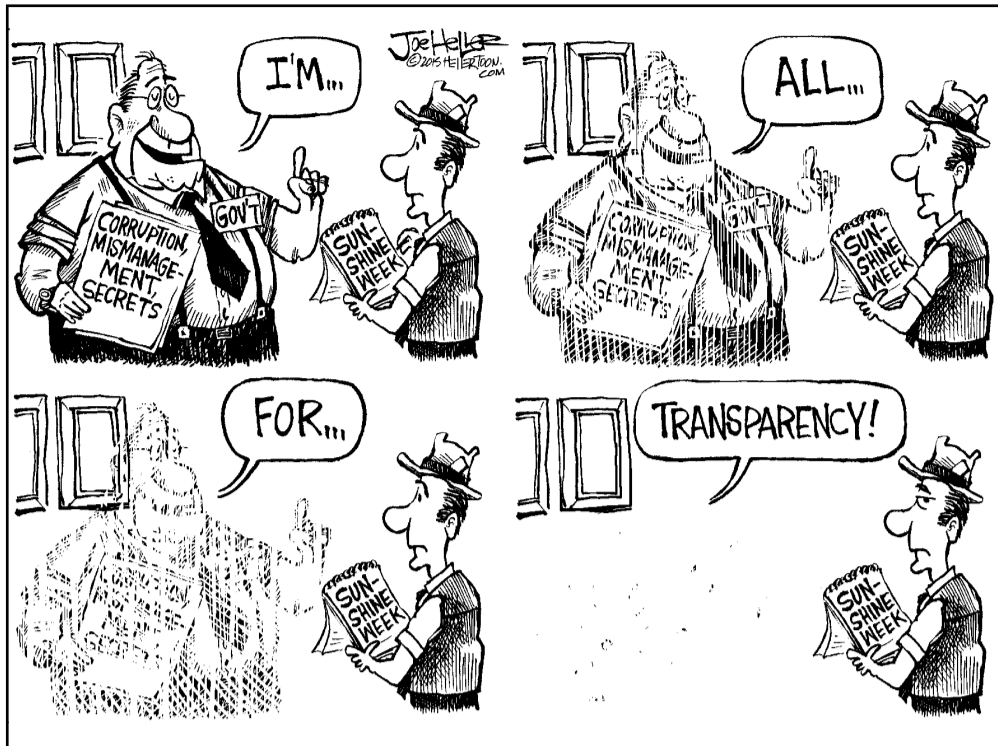
- **Independence Library Board** — 4 p.m., Independence Public Library, 175 Monmouth St., Independence. 503-838-1811.
- **Dallas School Board** — 6:30 p.m., Dallas School District office board room, 111 SW Ash St., Dallas. 503-623-9664, ext. 2334.

TUESDAY, MARCH 24

- **Polk County Board of Commissioners** — 9 a.m., Polk County Courthouse, 850 Main St., Dallas. 503-623-8173.
- **Independence City Council** — 7:30 a.m., Independence Civic Center, 555 S. Main St., Independence. 503-838-1212.
- **MINET Financial Advisory Committee** — 3:30 p.m., Oregon State Credit Union, 464 Pacific Ave. S., Monmouth. 503-837-0700.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25

- **Polk County Board of Commissioners** — 9 a.m., Polk County Courthouse, 850 Main St., Dallas. 503-623-8173.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

American Legion celebrates 96 years

This past week, the American Legion celebrated its 96th birthday. It was formed in Paris on March 15, 1919, by an American Expeditionary Force group. Among the service members there was Sgt. Carl B. Fenton of Dallas.

Although the American Legion was started in March 1919, Congress granted the American Legion its national charter in September 1919. The American Legion is a war time veteran organization for both veterans who have served overseas during a time of war, as well as veterans who have served in aiding them here at home. The American Legion was chartered by the U.S. Congress on Sept. 16, 1919.

From then on, the American Legion has grown and thrived with many programs. The American Legion baseball program was created on July 17, 1925, the first of the American Legion Boys State convenes was

held on June 23, 1935, in Springfield, Ill. On June 1, 1938, the American Legion held its first National High School Oratorical Championship in Norman, Okla.

In August 1919, Post 20 in Dallas was formed, although the charter was not issued until January 1920. It was named after Carl B. Fenton, who passed away before the post was formed.

Beth A. Lillibridge
Dallas

Too many taxes burden taxpayers

Property taxes increased this year over last year. Given the increasing rate of poverty in Oregon, many folks are just barely getting by without the added burden of another tax increase. Food prices are increasing and gas prices are going up along with a possible new carbon fuel tax being proposed by the Oregon Legislature. I wonder how many people are being forced out of their homes due to fore-

closures because they can't make ends meet. The taxing and spending increases need to stop. Vote no on the public safety tax.

Shirley Mannenbach
Dallas

Vote 'no' on county public safety levy

Why should we vote yes on the public safety levy when the county commissioners control the budget for the sheriff's office, and they can adjust the funding until it is the same as it is now? The commissioner's office is in full control of the sheriff's budget, and if they wanted his budget bigger they would have given it to him. I am certain they will repeat this history and cut his funds again. Across the nation other sheriffs have encouraged communities to watch out for their neighbors and stand together. We encourage everyone to vote no.

Ron and Annette Coxson
Dallas

Body cams: public records?

Cameras of all sorts are everywhere. Sometimes what they record is routine and innocuous, but often the events that are captured raise questions.

When video recordings are prepared by or for a government agency in New York, they are "records" subject to rights conferred by FOIL (Freedom of Information Law). As in all instances, their content and the effects of disclosure are the key factors in determining which portions are public or may be withheld.

If a surveillance camera is mounted on a police vehicle in plain sight in the park and captures what anyone in a public place can see, the video would be available under FOIL to anyone. Its presence, in fact, deterred bad

behavior. But if a camera is hidden and placed in a high crime area to record what may be criminal activity, the recording might justifiably be withheld.

Those are easy examples, but what about police officers' use of bodycams? If a video involves the commission of a crime, disclosure might interfere with an investigation or deprive a person of a right to a fair trial. If it involves the person on the street who's a witness, disclosure could jeopardize that person's safety. If it's the victim of a crime ..., disclosure might result in an invasion of privacy.

By Robert J. Freeman, executive director
New York State Department of State

WANT TO WRITE A LETTER?

Letters to the editor are limited to 300 words. Longer letters will be edited.

Election-related letters of all types are limited to 100 words. Writers are limited to one election-related letter per election season. Election letters from writers outside of Polk County are not accepted.

Each writer is restricted to one letter per 30-day period.

Letters that are libelous, obscene or in bad taste will not be printed. Attacks by name on businesses or individuals will not be printed.

Letters to the editor that are obvious promotions for a business, products or services will not be printed.

The *Itemizer-Observer* does not guarantee the accuracy of facts presented by letter writers; dissenters are welcome to respond. Letter writers who disagree with other published letter writers should maintain a civil discourse and address the subject, not the author.

Letters, like all editorial material submitted to the newspaper, are edited for length, grammar and content.

Letters must include the author's name, address and telephone number. This includes letters submitted via the *I-O's* website. Names and cities of residence are published; street addresses and telephone numbers are used for verification purposes only.

Letters must be submitted from individuals, not organizations, and must be original submissions to the *I-O*, not copies of letters sent to other media.

Letters of thanks to businesses, individuals and organizations are limited to 10 names. The deadline for letters to the editor is 10 a.m. Monday. Letters submitted may not be retractable after this deadline.

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