

# Opinion

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## EDITORIAL

# Secrecy in Salem

Last week wasn't a good week for Oregon Gov. Kate Brown, but the political problems were of her own making.

No candidate, two weeks before the election, wants to deal with a single story about being prompted to release public information.

Brown had to deal with two.

We can't know how this pair of miscues will affect Brown's race against Republican Knute Buehler, which polls show is close. But the episodes cast considerable doubt on Brown's sincerity when she said in February 2015, just after replacing John Kitzhaber as governor, that "we also must strengthen laws to ensure timely release of public documents."

Based on that statement it seems passing strange that a state judge had to order Brown's administration to release about 250 bill proposals that could be introduced to the Oregon Legislature early in 2019.

(The Appeals Court on Friday overturned that judge's decision and granted a stay to keep the proposals confidential until after the election.)

Those proposals, which would hint at at least some of Brown's priorities should she be re-elected, have in the past been readily available.

But this year state officials contend those bill proposals, also known as legislative concepts, are protected by attorney-client privilege because they were written by legislative lawyers.

Judge Audrey Boyles of Marion County Circuit Court disagreed. Unfortunately, the Appeals Court's ruling enables Brown's administration to depart from past practice regarding legislative concepts.

The second issue involves the state's annual school performance ratings reports. These have traditionally been released in October, and school districts have had the current reports since Oct. 4, with a planned release date of Oct. 25.

But earlier this month, state education officials told school administrators that the reports would be withheld from public release until after the Nov. 6 election.

Colt Gill, whom Brown appointed as director of the state Department of Education, said he made the decision without asking Brown's opinion. After widespread complaints about the delay, Brown ordered the school reports to be released on Wednesday.

Predictably, Buehler sought to capitalize on the hastily reversed decision about releasing the school reports.

It's not clear where the impetus was in either of these attempts to thwart Oregonians from having access to public records to which they're legally entitled.

But that's not the point. Brown is the governor, and she is responsible for the actions — or in this case, inactions — of her administration.

And in contrast to her rhetoric from 2015, Brown seems rather less committed to disclosing public records than her words led us to believe.

*From the Baker City Herald editorial board. The board consists of editor Jayson Jacoby and reporter Chris Collins.*

## Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy of all statements in letters to the editor.
- Letters are limited to 350 words; longer letters will be edited for length. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.
- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.
- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

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## Your views

### Vote for progress; pass school bond measure

As a registered voter, three months shy of 87, I am voting Yes for the school bond (Measure 1-88) in November for the following reasons.

I graduated from the old Baker High School in 1950. The last time voters passed a school bond was 1948. I was 16 years old! In 1948, the present Helen M. Stack Middle School housed the ninth grade with fewer than 150 students. Today the number of students is in excess of 270 students! That alone is reason enough to vote yes.

Remodel of the original high school would be expensive, but would be attractive to business and of historical value should Baker grow.

Those voters concerned about housing seventh- and eighth-graders in the same building as ninth-through 12th-graders should be advised that the unmonitored use of the computer and cellphones via the internet are more apt to corrupt our children than any of those older students. Many smaller schools house grades 7-12 with no apparent abandonment of moral values. Harper and North Powder come to mind.

As a Baker voter who graduated from BHS class of 1950 and taught in the Helen M. Stack Middle School building (1960-61); the old high school building (1969-70); the new high school, prior to the fire (1961-63); and after the fire (1970-77), I think it is time to leave the nostalgic past and vote Yes for progress in November.

**John G. Heriza**  
Baker City

### Nichols has the skills and attributes the county needs

I was a Scoutmaster for many years and I recognize through the Boy Scout Oath Law and Promise people with high standards. Bruce Nichols is one of those people — honest, trustworthy, loyal and willing to help others.

He takes time to listen to you and discuss your concerns. He is very knowledgeable on his responsibility of the things that can affect you as citizens of this county and the necessary adjustments to help you and also make you proud to be a citizen of Baker County.

He has the advantage and knows the financial part that is so important to keep our county operating profitably and in the best interest of the people. He has dedicated many hours in research and studies to know what problems we face and has helped do the work to implement the things that will solve those problems.

He has a great love for our beautiful county and desires to work to keep it the way we desire it to be.

So we urge you to mark your ballot to elect Bruce Nichols as county commissioner chairman.

**Bob and Marilyn Harrison**  
Baker City

### Current schools don't meet modern educational needs

I am a retired elementary educator who had the honor of working in the

Baker School District for 36 years. During this time, I witnessed staff members work extremely hard to provide a quality education for our children in a less than optimum learning environment.

Adequate space at the elementary level is and has been an issue. During my tenure, I have worked in the following converted settings: divided classrooms and libraries, stages, hallways, rooms behind display cases, closets, basement areas next to boiler rooms and in old shower rooms underneath stages.

The design of most of our current school buildings are functionally obsolete. They were built for an instructional model that's been long outdated. None of this was a problem when our buildings were built. At that time, teachers were more likely to stand at the front of the classroom and lecture, and the students were expected to listen or work quietly at their desks. A growing body of research has found that school facilities can have a profound impact on both student and teacher outcomes. School facilities affect safety, health, behavior, student engagement, learning and growth in achievement for students.

The rapid advances of technology, new government mandated programs and the very different way teachers approach teaching today have created a tremendous need to rebuild and redesign our current schools. These changing teaching methods and educational practices require different types and sizes of teaching spaces. The modern curriculum requires much greater access to power, data and mechanical systems that are not served by in our older buildings.

My husband and I have raised three children in Baker and have four grandchildren that live in the community. Baker County is a great place to live. Now that we are older, it has become increasingly important to us that we attract the best quality health providers and other professional services. We can't attract them without a competitive educational system for their children.

We talk about how much we care about education and our children. Let's show that we mean it by voting yes on Measure 1-88.

**Beth Bigelow**  
Haines

### Vote no on school bond; preserve historic buildings

Citizens of Baker, please vote No on the school bond Measure 1-88 this election. The superintendent and school board are committed to tearing down the historical Central Building. Once demolished they wish to sell the property for around \$200,000. Instead a new structure that will fall into disrepair as all the other Baker 5J school buildings have done. Vote No. We should be pushing to restore the Central Building for the \$18 million the board was quoted, keeping the middle school centralized and within walking distance for a majority of the students. All institutions of higher learning value their history and architecture. Harvard, Yale, Oxford, U of

O, Central Catholic, Jesuit, EOU, etc., all restore, maintain and value their original buildings with rich history and architectural integrity.

Vote No so that some day a superintendent who values this town's history can bring the Central Building to "new standards." New buildings don't mean a better education. Teachers make a better education. We can find people to write grants for historical restoration instead of placing the full cost on the citizens of Baker. The school district should take care of the buildings we have already paid for.

**Verla Boles**  
Baker City

### Harvey a tireless voice for access to public lands

The Baker County Natural Resource Committee is one of numerous opportunities for people to take an active role in county affairs. As the name implies, natural resources is the focus of the committee. Representatives from our mining community, grazing, timber, and water sit at the table. Threw into the mix you will find me, speaking up for access. I know very little about the other fields, but I do know, without access, the others will struggle to exist. Roads are needed and are the tool for these economic engines to be productive. At the very least, preservation of present access is crucial. Bill Harvey understands all that an "open forest" entails.

As Baker County Commission Chair, he directs and oversees this committee. Our present strong position on the Blue Mountain Forest Plan is the direct tireless result of Bill's commitment. Four years ago, Bill was the lone voice speaking for coordination. He repeatedly reminds the Forest Service and BLM of their duty to follow laws that came directly from their agencies. Bill has the support of Eastern Oregon Counties Association and has earned national recognition. Bill has directed his energy to coordinating with the agencies that oversee our public lands.

Mr. Nichols covets Bill's position, question is why? The obvious answer, Bruce believes he could do a better job. Mr. Nichols wants to mislead you into thinking he saved the Tri-County Weed program, ignoring the fact it was Bill that brought them to the negotiating table. Bruce chirps "transparency," no one tells him anything. Transparency is a two-way street, Mr. Nichols, did you consider sharing your audit information with fellow commissioners before contacting the newspaper? I challenge your so-called concern for the county staff, hitting the papers with your smoking gun, sure didn't create any grief for them. Your smoking gun is nothing, no foul play, the audit will be OK, what is your gripe? Are we back to a "gotcha" campaign, reminiscent of two years ago?

Mr. Harvey brings his projects and concerns to the commission first, not the press.

Vote for Bill Harvey, more and more apparent the best choice.

**Wanda Ballard**  
Baker City