

# Opinion

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## GUEST EDITORIAL

# Don't suppress records of crimes

### Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

Granting a pardon has been a rare thing for Oregon governors to do. Gov. Kate Brown has issued only a handful since she has been in office.

When a pardon is granted should all legal records for the case be sealed up?

A bill proposed for the 2019 Legislature would do just that. It's an attempt — rooted in the best of intentions — to allow people who have been pardoned to get on with their lives without being shadowed by a criminal record. But the Legislature should reject the proposal.

The bill comes, in part, because of the experience of Dondrae Fair. Brown granted him a pardon in February. He committed armed robbery in 1992 and served a five-year prison sentence.

Fair became an advocate for other young men who chose gangs, drugs and violence. When his attorney sought a pardon from Brown, even members of Multnomah County's criminal justice system wrote recommendations for him, according to The Oregonian.

Aliza Kaplan, a law professor at Lewis & Clark and Fair's attorney, said Fair received a "beautiful certificate" from Gov. Brown about his pardon. But there was no mechanism within the law to clear the relevant case from the legal record. The proposed legislation changes that.

The proposal directs the governor or a designee to take action within 10 days of a pardon. The governor is to notify the court where the conviction occurred to seal the related record of conviction and other pertinent records. A seal means it would take a judge to open up the record of the case again. Kaplan also says the conviction would no longer show up in a criminal background check.

Fair is to be admired for changing the direction of his life and for trying to change the direction of others. He did, though, commit armed robbery. It should not be the practice of the state to suppress the truthful, historical legal record when a crime occurred. This bill would enable that for pardons.

## GUEST EDITORIAL

### Editorial from The Medford Mail Tribune:

How much is a human life worth? That may sound like a cold calculation, but it is relevant to a dispute over safety standards for trains that carry highly flammable crude oil and ethanol across the United States, including down the Columbia Gorge.

In September, the Trump administration scrapped an Obama-era rule that would have required new-generation electronic brakes on trains carrying flammable fuels, saying the cost of complying with the new rule would be higher than the benefit.

Last week, the Associated Press determined that the government's analysis of the new rule left out \$117 million in estimated future damages from train derailments that

could be prevented by installing the electronic braking systems.

Not to worry, Transportation Department officials said. They will publish a correction in the federal register, but the decision to scrap the rule stands.

Why? Because even with the additional savings, the cost of better brakes still exceeds the benefit of fewer crashes.

This is just the latest example of train and oil industry resistance to safety improvements aimed at oil trains that pose the risk of catastrophic explosions and fires. In 2015, the Obama administration adopted a package of new safety requirements after dozens of accidents involving trains carrying hundreds of tank cars full of volatile crude oil from tar

sands in Canada. The worst such accident happened in 2013 in Quebec, when an unattended oil train derailed in Lac-Mégantic, killing 47 people and obliterating much of the town in a huge fireball.

In 2016, a Union Pacific train derailed near Mosier, Oregon, in the Columbia Gorge. No one was killed, and the resulting fire did no major damage, but the accident could have been much worse.

The new braking systems apply brakes simultaneously on all cars in a train rather than sequentially, as conventional air brake systems do. This allows trains to stop faster and reduces the number of cars that derail.

Safety advocates are calling for reconsidering the rule and recalculating the benefits of

the new brakes.

The modern technology is not cheap; the Obama Transportation Department estimated upgrading braking systems would cost \$664 million over 20 years, but would save \$470 million to \$1.1 billion from avoiding accidents. The Trump administration reduced that benefit to between \$131 million and \$374 million, based largely on a drop in the number of oil train shipments to 200,000 carloads.

While fewer shipments might mean statistically fewer accidents, all it takes is one to destroy property and claim lives. Transportation officials should recalculate the benefit of preventing those deaths before they happen, not after.

## CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

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**U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley:** D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Pendleton office: 310 S.E. Second St. Suite 105, Pendleton 97801; 541-278-1129; [merkley.senate.gov](mailto:merkley.senate.gov).

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**U.S. Rep. Greg Walden** (2nd District): D.C. office: 2182 Rayburn Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400, fax, 541-624-2402; [walden.house.gov](mailto:walden.house.gov).

**Oregon Gov. Kate Brown:** 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; [www.governor.oregon.gov](http://www.governor.oregon.gov).

**Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read:** [oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us](mailto:oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us); 350 Winter St. NE, Suite 100, Salem OR 97301-3896; 503-378-4000.

**Oregon Attorney General Ellen F. Rosenblum:** Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

**Oregon Legislature:** Legislative documents and information are available online at [www.leg.state.or.us](http://www.leg.state.or.us).

**State Sen. Cliff Bentz** (R-Ontario): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., S-301, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1730. District office: P.O. Box 1027, Ontario, OR 97914; 541-889-8866.

**State Rep. Lynn Findley** (R-Vale): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1460. Email: [Rep.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:Rep.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov)

**Baker City Hall:** 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-6541; fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers. Mike Downing, Loran Joseph, Randy Schiewe, Rosemary

Abell, Arvid Andersen and Adam Nilsson.

**Baker City administration:** 541-523-6541. Fred Warner Jr., city manager; Dustin Newman, police chief; John Clark, fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

**Baker County Commission:** Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.

**Baker County departments:** 541-523-8200. Travis Ash, sheriff; Jeff Smith, roadmaster; Matt Shirtcliff, district attorney; Alice Durlinger, county treasurer; Cindy Carpenter, county clerk; Kerry Savage, county assessor.

**Baker School District:** 2090 4th Street, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-524-2260; fax 541-524-2564. Superintendent: Mark Witty. Board meets the third Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m., Baker School District 5J office boardroom; Andrew Bryan, Kevin Cassidy, Chris Hawkins, Katie Lamb and Julie Huntington.



# Where have our families gone?

## JAY AMBROSE

the opposing list does, too. And so let's talk about the dissolution of one of the most important features of our society or any society known in history: the family.

It has dissolved to the point that 42 percent of children in this country live without their father in the home. This is a horror for them. The mother is often left with more than she can handle. Men do in fact bring something special to the raising of children, just as women do. The children are deprived of lessons they need to learn and of a human being who is more than lessons.

Let's look at some of the consequences.

Various studies, many of them by the federal government, show, for instance, that 85 percent of children haunted by behavioral disorders are from fatherless homes. Youth suicides? 63 percent are from fatherless homes, it's reported. If you find a homeless child, there's a 90 percent chance he or she comes from a fatherless home, and if you find a high school dropout, chances are 71 percent. Turn the other direction, to such positives as children getting A's or staying away from drugs or staying away from crime or prison, and the odds are high that they have a dad around.

Obviously, huge numbers of children from fatherless homes are as terrific as they come, and just as obviously, you

don't want some fathers in the home — they can be terrors. Fathers are often irresponsible and flee the scene. Divorce, death and the wisdom of the mother are other causes of their absence. It is the case, too, that vast numbers of children without a father around are children of women who never get married in the first place.

When I have written about this before I have received emails saying it is an insult to women to say that a father is needed. I think it is disdain for children and the facts to say that fathers do not mostly make a positive difference.

So much to say, so little space, but let's say something about those universities that say hokey to Western civilization while focusing instead on courses about identity groups. Let's wonder why they feel justified to forget Shakespeare in English courses. What happened to the Boy Scouts? Is it OK to fire people on the basis of normal political beliefs? Are you aware that trust is evaporating in America? What has the opioid crisis told us? What has happened to the objectivity standard in the reporting of certain news outlets? Are Halloween costumes the new evil?

America almost always pretty much fixes itself, but this shutdown could go on for a while. Nevertheless, happy New Year and please make resolutions to help.

*Jay Ambrose is a columnist for Tribune News Service.*

