

OUR VIEW

Officials answer to the public

Occasionally it is prudent to remind voters in Oregon of a few, fundamental elements regarding our access to government.

In Oregon, the presumption is always government is, and will always will be, open to public scrutiny. This scrutiny promotes our form of democracy and also furnishes a degree of transparency.

In short, all Oregonians have a right to know what their government is doing, how it is spending taxpayer money and what that money is spent on. This isn't a nifty notion, or an aspiration. It is a right. Like the right to keep and bear arms. Like the right of free speech. It isn't a debatable item.

In short, every single Oregonian has the right to prepare and deliver a public records request to any government entity to seek specific records. Some records are inaccessible and are "exempt." These exempt records are that way for a very specific reason with a narrow scope.

The important question for readers is what is a newspaper's role in such a paradigm. A newspaper — a good one at least — acts as a sort of de facto representative of the people. When matters that are important to the body politic as a whole come to light, the newspaper can act in the public interest and file a public records request. This action isn't about pursuing red herrings or hounding hard-working elected and public officials. The process is designed to help inform the public — voters — so they can make good decisions about policy. That's because elected and appointed officials — at least in our nation — don't get to do whatever they want when they want. Our system doesn't work that way. Every public and elected official is beholden to the voters. Every public and elected official has but one responsibility — to represent their constituents.

That means, in the end, that public and elected leaders are required to be open with the public. Whether they want to or not, they must answer to the body politic. As a newspaper, our role is ensuring that those elected and appointed officials don't lose sight of that important fact and to certify they are being open and transparent.

Occasionally, that system puts us at odds with people who have the best interest of the public at heart but don't see why certain elements of their work should be open to the public. We take no pleasure creating more work for public or elected officials but we consider our role as a watchdog to be vital for not only the health of our little piece of the Republic but for the well-being of our system of government as a whole.

We take our job seriously and readers should rest assured we will meet any challenge to keep our readers informed.

After all, that's our job.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the Baker City Herald. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the Baker City Herald.



Falling into the rabbit hole of the energy facility siting process

Alice sits in the docket in a courtroom full of what look like sheep but are really members of the Oregon Energy Facilities Siting Committee (EFSC). In the back of the court are what appear to be vultures but are actually Idaho Power lawyers and PR persons. In the judge's seat is the Brown Queen. The sheep are baaaing, the vultures are grinning on their perches, hunched, rubbing the tips of their wings together as if they had hands and, the Brown Queen is screaming at Alice, "Shut up! Shut up!"

Alice yells back, "This is nothing but a kangaroo court."

"Of course it is!" the Brown Queen screams, "Why? Because we always jump to our own conclusions."

Alice interrupts: "Like for Idaho Power, and it makes me hopping mad. How deep is a kangaroo's pocket anyway?"

"Order!" shouts the Brown Queen, "None of your impertinence! Letters you address to us we will ignore because a power company helped elect me and in turn I own the weasels — hmmm, I mean sheep, who I appointed or sanctioned. We make this look democratic. Write protest letters all you want but remember, we make the rules. We even have a rule if you don't cross your i's and dot your t's we automatically throw your letter out."

"But you don't dot t's or cross your i's."

"Oh but I do!" the Brown Queen exclaims, crossing her eyes. "And after they cross, I do it again, that way everyone who voted for me knows I'm a double crosser. Next, everyone's letters, like yours, I feed them to my EFSC weasels — hmmm, I mean sheep, who make fun of them before voting on the



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known outcome. That's why we always win. And you lose."

"But it isn't fair," Alice cries. "The power lines are unnecessary. The only reason you want to approve this is because Idaho Power is buttering your bread. New technology will render Idaho Power's project useless. Idaho Power plans on ruining over 9,000 acres of land running lines through Eastern Oregon and give us nothing. To boot, Idaho Power has no honest plan to stop their equipment from spreading noxious weeds into our farmlands!"

"Shut her up!" the Brown Queen bellows.

The noise in the court gets louder, the EFSC sheep are baaaing with intent and the Idaho Power vultures are ruffling feathers and are blowing raspberries. Alice continues:

"What about fires like the Paradise fire that was started by PG&E? Idaho Power plans to use our volunteer firemen to extinguish their fires. You're going to approve Idaho Power's plans to destroy our national heritage, ruining

Letters to the editor

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tracks of the Oregon Trail, and then rub it in by stringing wires and planting towers in plain sight of the BLM's Oregon Trail Interpretive Center. It will ruin the tourism Baker has nurtured."

"Off with her head!" the Brown Queen roars.

"At least I have one," Alice retorts. "What about noise? EMFs? No plan for those is there? And those Idaho Power dams built 50 years ago promising to build fish ladders for them but lied just to build the dams? And you are slobbering to give license to Idaho Power to do as they please and run permanent havoc throughout Eastern Oregon. You were given charge of protecting citizens, not nurturing profits for big businesses! And furthermore ..."

But the vultures began squawking "Ignore the facts! Ignore the facts!" and Alice can no longer be heard. Ripping off their outfits, the sheep have suddenly revealed themselves as weasels who begin hissing. The Brown Queen smashes her gavel on her desk, and crossing her eyes, commands, "Take her away! No, bring her here! Let me give her a sentence: 'lake Alice away and make her wrile protest lellers the resl of her life and when elernily comes, remove her head.' There! How do you like that sentence?"

"You didn't cross your t's."

"No but I crossed my eyes."

"Your rules," said Alice, "Don't make any sense."

Alice said much more that day. But it can't be printed here.

Whit Deschner is a Baker City resident and member of the Stop B2H Coalition.

Bear is back: Grylls captures a new generation

It occurred to me recently that far too much time had passed since I watched a man bite off a snake's head and drink his own urine.

Not that he did it on the same day or anything.

And although I was pretty sure this particular man also once slaked his thirst by squeezing liquid from manure he yanked out of an animal's bloated carcass, I couldn't be certain whether the dung donor was a camel or a wildebeest.

I missed Bear Grylls.

The Englishman was once a formidable TV personality but I couldn't recall the last time I had seen him on the screen.

Grylls starred in "Man vs. Wild," which aired on the Discovery Channel from 2006 to 2011.

The show's concept was simple and for me, at least temporarily, all but irresistible.

Grylls would make a dramatic entrance into some forbidding landscape — he often leaped from a helicopter or some similarly death-defying feat — and then



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make his way through the desert or mountains or jungle or whatever, eventually reaching civilization.

Along the way Grylls would demonstrate a variety of survival techniques. Some of these were quite straightforward and potentially useful — Grylls is quite adept at starting fires, for instance.

But it was his flair for the outlandish that so appealed to an audience accustomed, by 2006, to the spectacle that is reality television.

Grylls was forever putting himself into precarious situations — scaling cliffs without ropes and diving into frigid whitewater rivers and poking about in caves.

But I daresay his reputation was made largely on his willingness to swallow items most people would deign even to touch with a fingertip.

Grylls consumed, in addition to his own bodily fluids, various insects, some of which made a considerable crunch if you turned up the hi-fi far enough while he was biting down. He was also prone to gulping down parts of animals that had not been rendered slightly more palatable by exposure to flame.

And one time he gave himself an enema.

In common with many reality TV series, I eventually became fatigued with "Man vs. Wild" largely because it was repetitive.

Grylls traveled to a different place for each episode, but his exploits followed a predictable script. You knew he would conquer some topographical obstacle with panache — but with a cliffhanger followed by a commercial — construct some rudimentary but clever shelter, fashion a fire and eat something that would make most people vomit.

The formula became too familiar to be especially compelling.

It became clear to me that Grylls

wasn't likely to, for instance, perform an appendectomy on himself and then eat the superfluous organ. I gradually lost interest.

But then my son, Max, who's 8 and thus too young to have watched Grylls during his cable heyday, found out about the show.

Max and his sister, Olivia, who's 12, insisted we investigate the streaming services to see if "Man vs. Wild" is available.

Naturally — inevitably — it is.

We started with the episode from Season 3 when Grylls tackles the Black Hills and the Badlands of South Dakota. This wasn't coincidental, as we had recently visited both places. And although we hiked in the Black Hills we had sufficient food and water in our packs that we didn't have to resort to less pleasant forms of sustenance.

Both Max and Olivia have taken to "Man vs. Wild" with enthusiasm, neither being jaded, as I am, by overexposure in the past.

Max, who already had a budding fascination with outdoor tools, is

especially enamored with Grylls' accouterments.

I sat down at our laptop the other evening and the active tab was a website featuring a fearsome survival knife — the sort of weapon Rambo might deploy when his M-16 or a flamethrower was a trifle too impersonal for dispatching half a dozen mercenaries.

We had a discussion, Max and I, just before bed recently about the merits of fixed-blade and folding knives. This is a topic that rarely comes up in the Hardy Boys books we read most nights.

And although Frank and Joe, like Bear Grylls, get into plenty of scrapes, most of their adventures involved hearty comfort foods lovingly prepared and served by their mother or by Aunt Gertrude.

Also, the Hardys, when threatened by dehydration, always find a convenient spring before resorting to less savory refreshments.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.