

OUR VIEW

Police discipline records should be accessible

It's remarkably easy in Oregon to find out when a doctor is disciplined. The Oregon Medical Board posts details on its website. It's remarkably easy in Oregon to find out when a nurse was disciplined. The Oregon Nursing Board posts details on its website. It's remarkably difficult in Oregon to track the details when a member of law enforcement is disciplined.

Does that make any sense?

Most doctors and nurses are not employed by government. Members of law enforcement are public employees. Why doesn't the public have easy access to their disciplinary records?

If you are near a computer, you can go right now to the Oregon Medical Board website and find out details of disciplinary action against doctors.

It's not only when doctors get their certification revoked, either. Sometimes it's when they must modify their practice, such as being barred from prescribing opioids or practicing telemedicine.

It's similar for the Oregon Nursing Board. Once again, the information does not only include if a nurse had his or her license revoked.

It can include details of if a nurse was terminated by an employer and what he or she must do while on probation.

It took The Oregonian two years — yes, two years — to get records from the state on cases in which state regulators investigated if an officer's certification should be revoked.

The state agency threw up obstacle after obstacle to deny the request. First, it charged a small fortune. The state agency

said The Oregonian had to pay \$17,000.

We aren't saying there isn't a cost to providing the public with public information, but it should be included in the budget of state agencies. It's part of their job.

That \$17,000 wasn't the end of the blockades the agency put up. For a more complete recounting, read the story www.oregonlive.com/police-fire/2017/12/police_discipline_records.html.

After that fight, some changes were made. And the state Board of Public Safety Standards and Training does make public decisions when it decides to revoke or not revoke the certification of police officers.

But the details are far from easily accessible.

The problems are not limited to the state board.

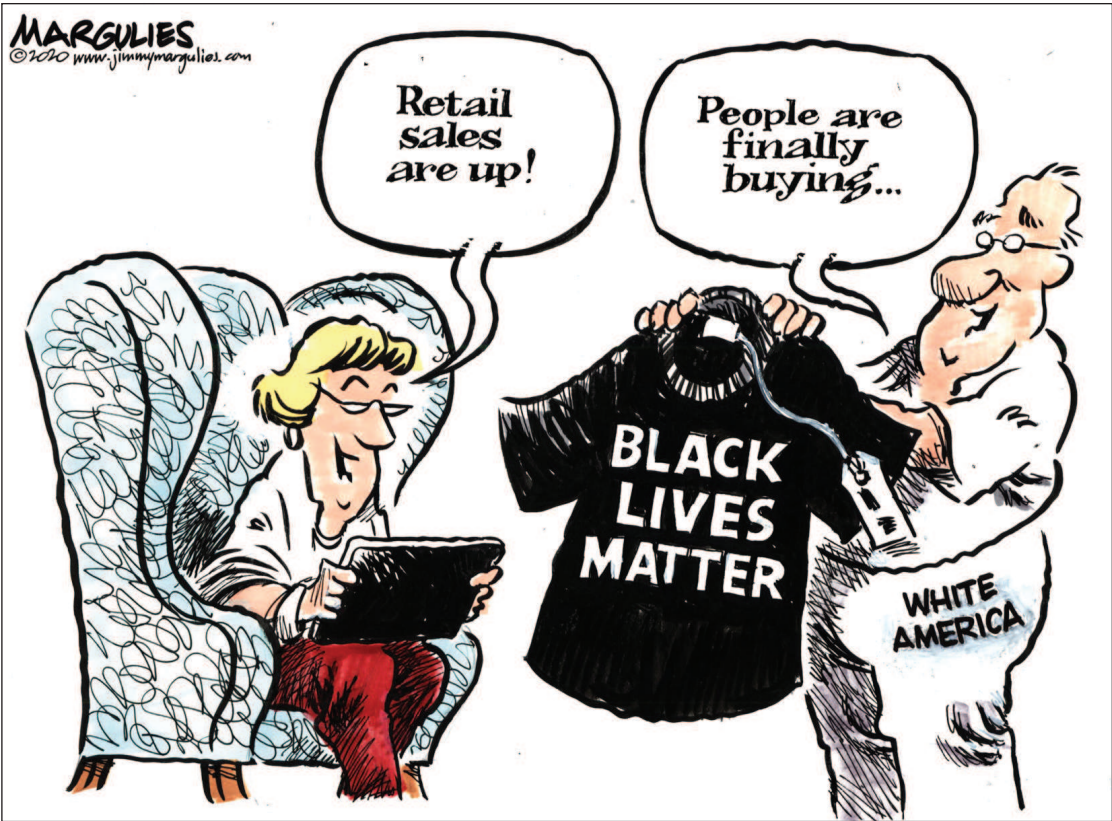
If an officer is disciplined for inappropriate conduct by his or her local department for, say, use of force, why isn't that easily available to the public?

If a law enforcement agency or its insurance company must pay a settlement for an incident, shouldn't the details be required to be publicly released?

Requiring body cameras and banning chokeholds only go so far. The public must be able to hold law enforcement accountable.

That means disclosure of when disciplinary actions were taken and not taken and the related investigations.

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Bridge the digital divide

As COVID-19 has pushed many Americans online to work and attend school, we hear a lot about Zoom fatigue and other annoyances. But what about the tens of millions of Americans who either have only limited internet access at home, or no access at all?

Lack of internet access in some households and communities has long been a national problem. The pandemic has turned it into a national crisis. It's time to close our nation's digital divide. Millions of American can access the internet only through smartphones. That's better than nothing, but plagued by serious limitations: Data caps and slower speeds greatly limit what users can do. And some important tasks — like filling out complex applications for employment or college admission — are much harder, given the limits of a tiny touch screen.

The nonprofit group where I work has been talking to folks here in California and elsewhere about life on the wrong side of the digital divide, which makes everything harder, especially education. We spoke to a high school student taking business classes who struggles to create and upload web design assignments on her smartphone, and an older woman who had to drop out of a professional management course because she had no way to do the coursework online.

Fabiola Espitia, a counselor at Chaffey College in Rancho Cucamonga, California, told us about a recent high school graduate she counseled who couldn't take an Advanced Placement exam due to lack of internet access. Others had their education disrupted when the pandemic forced the closing of a campus library, their only internet connection.

Unsurprisingly, the digital divide mirrors economic and racial ones. Last year, a Pew Research survey found distinct patterns in who lacks internet access at home. While 92% of families with a household income of \$75,000 or more have a

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home broadband connection, that figure drops to 56% for incomes of \$30,000 and below. While 79% of white households have a home internet connection, just 66% of black households and 61% of Latino households do.

Lack of internet access is a problem in urban and suburban homes, as well as in rural communities. And it is especially destructive when it comes to education. Overall, approximately 12 million students nationwide are affected by this digital divide, putting their futures at risk.

"Schools have shuttered and more than 50 million students have been told to head online for class," wrote Jessica Rosenworce, a member of the Federal Communications Commission, while dissenting from the rosy conclusions reached by the FCC's Republican majority in its annual Broadband Deployment Report. "This pandemic has demonstrated conclusively that broadband is no longer nice-to-have. It's need-to-have."

COVID-19 has shown us that the digital divide isn't sustainable if we want all Americans to have a fair shot at success.

The FCC needs to do more to bridge the digital divide, especially in urban and suburban homes. Congress must act swiftly and decisively by providing federal funding to build a future-proof, all-fiber network that reaches every household in the nation, and eliminating state-level bans on communities building their own networks.

Ensuring that everyone in the United States has access to robust, affordable, high-speed internet access should be a national priority.

Gissela Moya is the Manny Garcia Technology Equity Fellow at The Greenlining Institute and co-author of Greenlining's recent report, "On the Wrong Side of the Digital Divide." This column was produced for the Progressive Media Project, which is run by The Progressive magazine, and distributed by Tribune News Service.

Savoring a battle with no human casualties

I have been waging a war for several weeks against a clever and determined enemy that's trying to invade, and potentially ruin, my home. Fortunately no lives are in danger. No human lives, anyway.

The carpenter ants, on the other hand, are enemy combatants, and I am not inclined to give quarter.

I would prefer not to be embroiled in this conflict, or indeed any other.

But the battle has not been without benefit.

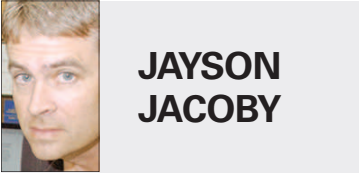
During this unprecedented spring of 2020, a season defined by sadness and disillusionment, I have occasionally appreciated being able to focus my frustration on something other than the various societal conflicts roiling America.

Which is to say I much prefer to think the best of people and to reserve my animosity for a bunch of ants, which among things don't have Facebook pages or access to smartphones.

I have found that while I'm concentrating on dealing with my invertebrate pests I enjoy a blissful interlude, when pandemics and protests seem less important.

Carpenter ants are hardly rare, of course.

I don't suppose a year has passed during the quarter century I've lived



in my house that I didn't see at least several of the bugs trundling along in a flowerbed or in the driveway.

I rather enjoy watching ants. An individual ant seems to move as aimlessly as a drunk searching for his car keys in an unlighted parking lot at 2 in the morning. But when you see even a handful of ants a certain purpose in their pattern, even a level of precision, usually becomes obvious. Ants, it goes without saying, can't accomplish much without teamwork.

Including chewing up my home, which is not at all entertaining.

This was the first spring I found carpenter ants in large numbers, and worse still they were crawling right beside the house.

My kids have even seen a few ants inside — most disturbingly for my 13-year-old daughter, a couple in the bathtub — also a first for me.

I don't have any particular grudge against ants, as they've never done me any harm. Indeed when I see them in the woods I un-

derstand the crucial roles they play, in spreading nutrients and serving as food for birds and other species.

But city-dwelling carpenter ants have the potential to become more than a nuisance.

Their affinity for burrowing into wood to create their nests — and they're not at all particular about whether that wood is a discarded 2-by-4 or the walls of a home — can cause major structural damage.

My first few forays against the ants reminded me of nothing so much as the final story in the 1982 anthology film "Creepshow." That's the one in which a fastidious man's apartment is infested with cockroaches.

It's delightfully creepy — especially the last scene when the cockroaches pour out of the dead man's mouth (he had a heart attack) and other parts of his body in a grisly brown flood.

Anyway, I was pottering around by our front porch one afternoon and I saw a single ant near the lower of the two wooden steps that give on to the porch. I raised my shoe, intending to step on it, but the ant veered at the last second, moving with a speed I wouldn't have believed possible.

Its escape left me off balance and

I barely avoided what could have been a nasty fall, what with all the sharp edges nearby.

But just as I was regaining my equilibrium another half dozen or so ants rushed out from beneath the steps.

I started a sort of tap dance.

This was energetic but scarcely more effective.

I suspect that if anyone was driving past during those 15 seconds or so they would have assumed I was in the throes of a seizure, or possibly being attacked by Asian hornets.

This unsettling episode prompted me to investigate around, and eventually underneath, the steps.

I found a few telltale mounds of shredded (which is to say, ant-chewed) wood, but these were only about as wide as a dime.

The other ant avenue I noticed was the walkway leading from the driveway to our back door. I frequently saw a few ants there, sometimes heading toward the house and other times away, but in both cases clearly on a mission. A few specimens were carrying larvae. Those I smashed with a particular satisfaction.

My wife, Lisa, later traced this route to a corner of one of her

raised flower beds, where I found more diminutive piles of masticated wood.

Most generally I prefer to sow seeds rather than poison on our place. And I like nothing better than to watch the honeybees going about their business on our flowers, to listen to their somnolent buzz at noon of a hot summer's day.

But I also have a mortgage.

And an aversion to four-figure bills for contractors.

I procured some ant-killing granules, which I distributed with what seemed to me significant restraint.

I'll concede that this was not easy. I felt a powerful urge to use something more akin to a carpet-bombing strategy.

But as any responsible warrior does, I seek to avoid collateral damage.

I still see carpenter ants on occasion but so far as I can tell we've reached an impasse, if not an armistice.

Although I can't help but worry that some day I'll step outside and find a corner of my house turned into a crumbling pile of ant munchings.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.