

# Opinion

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## EDITORIAL

# Making public records fees equal for all

House Bill 2485 in the Oregon Legislature sounds like something a newspaper would endorse.

The bill, which had a public hearing Thursday, Feb. 18, would require state agencies, on passage of the bill, to cut by 50% the fee for providing public records to the news media. The legislation would require local governments that are also subject to the public records law, such as cities, counties and school districts, to make the same 50% cut in fees starting Jan. 1, 2022.

The 50% reduction isn't exclusive to news media (a term the legislation doesn't define). Any request "made in public interest" would also qualify for the halved fee. But the bill would automatically deem requests from the news media as being in the public interest, and thus subject to the 50% fee reduction.

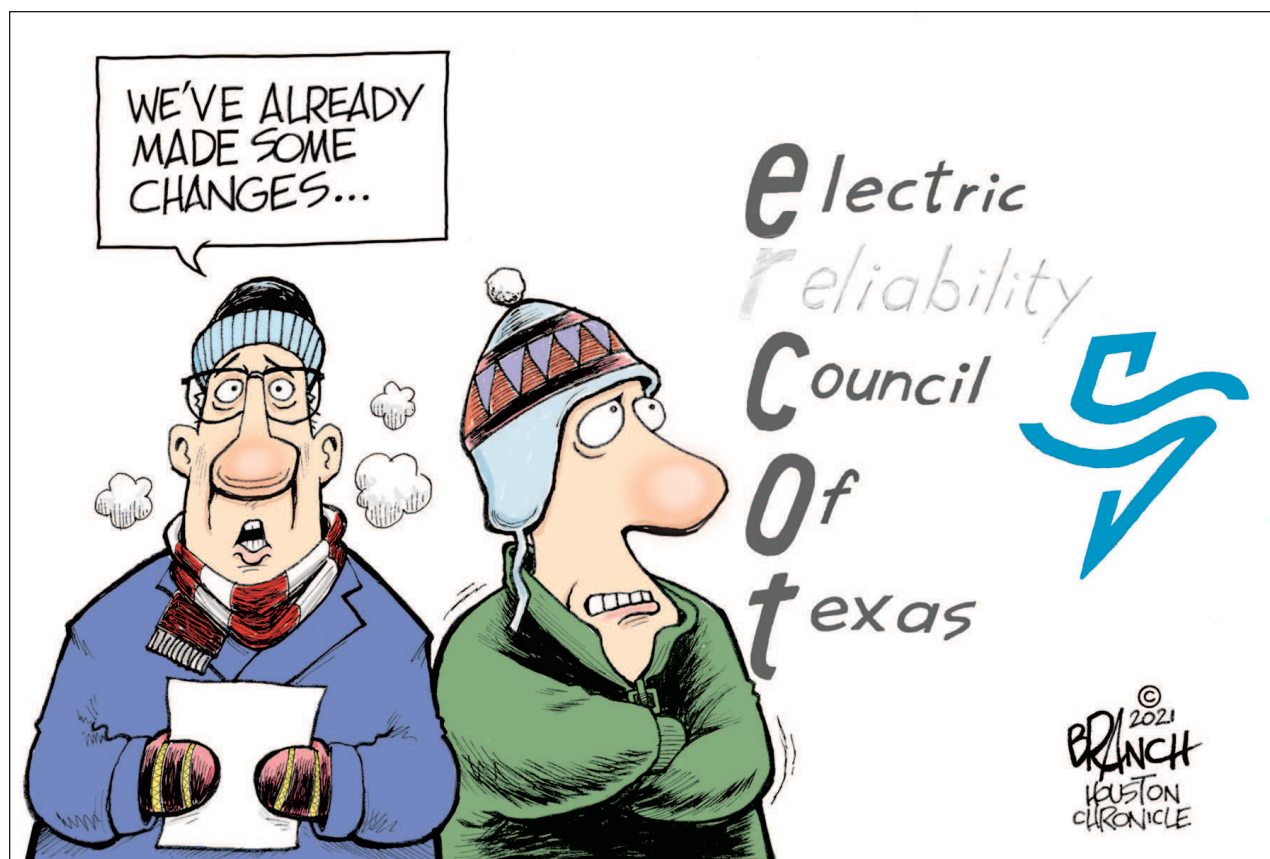
The idea of giving deference to the news media is not without foundation. It is reasonable to believe that a reporter is more likely to use public records for a purpose — distributing information to the public about the works of government — that could fairly be described as being in the public interest.

A citizen who isn't a journalist, by contrast, might not have the inclination, or the ability, to use public records for that purpose.

But here's the thing: Oregon's Public Records Law, which dates to 1973, is not the "News Media Public Records Law." It's just the Public Records Law. Every citizen has the same legal right to these records. This is as it should be. Just as the law doesn't give any group special access to records, neither should it charge any group less to retrieve those records.

The Legislature should pass a version of House Bill 2485 — a version that cuts fees by 50% for everyone who makes requests. Moreover, lawmakers need to emphasize to public agencies that the purpose of the Public Records Law is to make records readily available. Too often, whether or not the person requesting is a journalist, a combination of bureaucratic inertia and excessive fees renders the law's purpose a cruel illusion. House Bill 2485 addresses this very point: "... the costs of retrieving public records for reproduction can be minimal if a public body makes efforts to store public records in an orderly manner for easy retrieval." That, not deciding whether a request is in the public interest, should be the guiding principle for all public agencies.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



## Your views

### Councilor was wrong to cite 'emotion' in board choice

It's hard to believe in this day and age that a male city councilor had the nerve to play the "emotional female" card in a public meeting against our mayor. Was this an attempt at shaming her for a decision he didn't like? Councilor Jason Spriet is the one who should be ashamed. His desire to appoint his friend to the Golf Board was in fact the "emotional" response if ever I heard one. If Fred Warner Jr. had so many magical grant opportunities and contacts, he should have used them for the golf course during all the years he was city manager. Mayor McQuisten used solid personnel management 101 reasoning. Never, ever advance the application of a candidate who may be at odds with any of your team. I'm guessing that approach is a shock to good ole boys far and wide.

Chuck Chase  
Baker City

### Baker City manager, mayor right to stick to city charter

Thank you to the new city manager, Mr. Jon Cannon, for sticking to the city charter. Thanks to Mayor

McQuisten for having ethics and standing for the truth. Thanks for riding the city of the toxin and saying goodbye to the "Good Ole Boys Club."

From my perspective former city manager, Fred Warner, always had an agenda, and ignored the average person who did not fit into his club. This has been obvious to many Baker City folks for a very long time.

Fred randomly popped into a local restaurant that employs 24 local families just a few days before his retirement. He tried to bully the owner in support of the baseless health mandates. Who was he trying to help? He had no authority as a city employee to do this. Fred offered \$15,000 to the owner if he would drink the Kool-Aid and shut down. Where was he going to get these funds from? The business owner did not even know who he was. In all Fred's years with the city, he never once bothered to stop by and say hi or ask how he could help. I was there and listened to the conversation.

Now he says he is here to help on the golf board after retirement? Also, why would the previous mayor's wife be going around town bullying busi-

nesses to oppose the new city council and the new mayor? I have seen some interesting text messages from other local businesses to show this. This hatred is not helping anyone, only creating more dissension in our community. But they are here to "HELP?" ...

This leftist cancel culture has no place in Baker City!

Tom Hughes  
Baker City

### The lesson in Stalin's treatment of a chicken

Stalin once ripped all the feathers off a live chicken as a lesson to his followers. He then set the chicken on the floor a short distance away. The chicken was bloodied and suffering immensely, yet, when Stalin began to toss some bits of wheat toward the chicken, it followed him around. He said to his followers: "This is how easy it is to govern stupid people, they will follow you no matter how much pain you cause them, as long as you throw them a little worthless treat once in a while."

May God continue to bless America.

Bill Hanley  
Baker City

## CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

**President Joe Biden:** The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1111; to send comments, go to [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).

**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. Baker City office, 1705 Main St., Suite 504, 541-278-1129; [merkley.senate.gov](mailto:merkley.senate.gov).

**U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden:** D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; [wyden.senate.gov](mailto:wyden.senate.gov).

**U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz** (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).

**State Sen. Lynn Findley (R-Ontario):** Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., S-403, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1730. Email: [Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov)

**State Rep. Mark Owens (R-Crane):** Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1460. Email: [Rep.MarkOwens@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:Rep.MarkOwens@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. Councilors Lynette Perry, Jason Spriet, Kerry McQuisten, Shane Alderson, Joanna Dixon, Heather Sells and Johnny Waggoner Sr.

# Survey shortchanges Oregon's level of anger

The email's subject line had the intended effect of causing my eyes to pause as they slid down the list of new messages in my inbox.

I could scarcely avoid the lure of this sentence: "Oregonians got angry 5 times each week in 2020, reveals survey."

As an Oregonian who spent that entire year within the state's borders, I had to find out more about a survey that wasn't just flawed but was clearly the product of fantasy. Angry five times each week?

I got mad five times in as many minutes during 2020.

And not just once.

Nor do I think my experience was unusual.

If 2020 had an official emotion, surely anger was it.

The email also mentions "fear, stress and frustration," but those are merely the psychological blasting caps that can trigger a full-blown explosion of fury.

The message also states: "A slow WiFi connection, excess workload or any number of minor annoyances can set off your anger."

This is not Freudian-level analysis.



JAYSON JACOBY

But that sentence, however obvious its conclusion, also illustrates the absurdity of a survey that claims Oregonians were angry just five times per week last year, below the national average of six such weekly episodes.

(Among the other findings, Delaware was the "angriest" state, with residents getting mad 12 times a week, while Hawaiians were perturbed just twice a week. Hawaiians have a reputation for placidity, to be sure, what with the tranquil weather and the beaches and all. But the notion of Delaware being a seething stew of rage doesn't make sense. If anything, the state's residents ought to have been happier than usual, what with their local boy, Joe Biden, winning the presidency.)

Even setting aside WiFi and other computer problems — which of course you can't set aside when

your internet connection gets severed half an hour before a work deadline — the key phrase is "any number of minor annoyances."

That number, of course, is much closer to infinity than to zero.

A single task as basic as emptying the dishwasher can raise my ire half a dozen times.

A fork's tines get wedged into the silverware holder and when I yank it free I spill spoons all over the kitchen floor and then I whack my head on the open cupboard door when I stand up after retrieving the utensils and then I can't get the bowls to nest neatly and there's no room for more mugs and all of the sudden I feel a compulsion to start throwing dinner plates across the room like Frisbee discs.

And just like that I've plowed through my weekly allotment of five bouts of anger in a few minutes.

I wasn't asked to participate in the survey conducted by Alcohol.org, which in December 2020 surveyed 3,003 Americans (a strangely precise figure, it seems to me), according to the email I received from Cherry Digital.

But had I been queried I would

have at least tried to be accurate in estimating how frequently I had been angry during the year.

And I would have given a figure considerably higher than Oregon's average of five, or the national six, or even incensed Delaware's survey-topping dozen.

I suppose many people, even afforded the cloak of anonymity, are reluctant to admit just how often they get mad. Perhaps they're ashamed, feeling that succumbing to anger is a sign of weakness.

It can be, of course, when a person doesn't merely rage internally, but turns the emotion into unproductive action.

By tossing dinner plates, for instance.

But anger itself needn't be destructive.

Chopping firewood, by contrast, would be a worthwhile outlet.

Alcohol.org admits as much in the email, conceding that anger "can be a healthy emotion."

As you probably deduced, given the name of the organization that conducted the survey, respondents were asked about alcohol use as well as anger.

Specifically, the survey found that 68% of those who were angry due to the COVID-19 pandemic "have used alcohol as a coping mechanism."

That seems low to me.

But it may be that people are no more eager to admit downing a couple of beers or martinis than they are to confess to getting ticked off frequently.

The survey wasn't limited to questions about alcohol use.

About two of every three respondents who admitted drinking because they were mad said the alcohol "has the opposite effect and makes them angrier."

I'm not convinced this is a completely fair description of why angry people imbibe.

For me, alcohol doesn't transform my anger into tranquility so much as it makes the anger seem more reasonable. Beer is the liquid version of the friend who commiserates with you, who sympathizes when you explain why a single stuck fork got your blood boiling.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.