

OUR VIEW

Stop the secrecy

Oregon state Sen. Mike Dembrow, D-Portland, has been noisy about the need for the Oregon Health Authority to be transparent about the COVID-19 data it releases.

His bill, Senate Bill 719, would ensure that transparency. And though the bill should have long since passed the Legislature, it would seem to be in good hands. It's in the committee Dembrow chairs, joint ways and means.

The central premise of Oregon's public records law is that the public has a right to know what its government is doing. Meetings are open to the public. Government documents and the data behind them should be open to the public if requested.

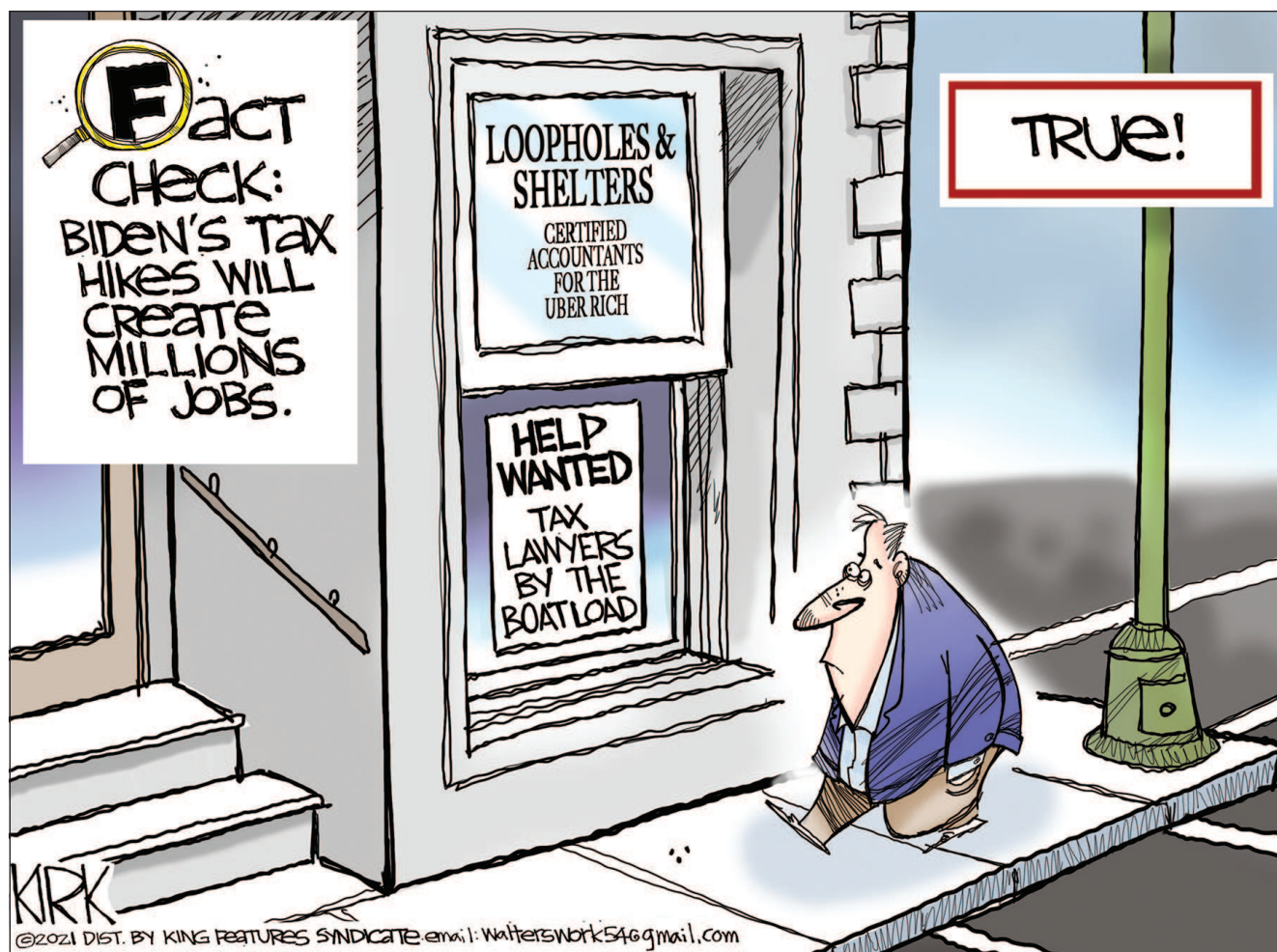
As good as Oregon's law is, it teems with exceptions. One is for public health investigations, Oregon Revised Statutes 433.008. It reads in part: "information obtained by the Oregon Health Authority or a local public health administrator in the course of an investigation of a reportable disease or disease outbreak is confidential and is exempt from disclosure." So when journalists and others have requested information about testing rates by ZIP code for instance, the request was denied.

ORS 433.008 doesn't mean that the information must be denied to the public. It means it can be denied. And when government can deny the public information, it often does.

Dembrow's bill simply requires the Oregon Health Authority or local public health administrator to release aggregate information about reportable disease investigations that does not identify individual cases or sources of information after receiving a public records request. This would not only apply to COVID-19. It would also apply to salmonella and E. coli outbreaks.

State officials are trying to encourage Oregonians to get vaccinated and continue to obey COVID restrictions and guidelines. It would send the wrong signal for the Legislature to now tell Oregonians: "Let's keep the secrecy" and not pass this bill.

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Your views

More to worry about than some power line towers

There still seems to be quite a controversy over Idaho Power's B2H transmission line and how unsightly the power line towers will be. This reminds me of a Bible verse (Matthew 23:24) that refers to straining at a gnat but swallowing a camel. In this case Idaho Power's B2H is the gnat. Unless the people react, the camel will be what is talked about, as follows.

The present administration wants to totally eliminate the use of fossil fuels including for generating electricity, and there is talk of breaching our power-generating dams. This would do away with the two main sources of electricity for this area. They propose replacing these power sources with wind turbines and fields of solar panels.

Just to meet the present demand for electricity would require wind turbines on every hilltop and along every ridge, and solar panels covering a good portion of the flatter land. What a sight that would be.

If that isn't bad enough, just think

of all the extra electricity that will be needed if the remainder of their plans are enacted. Their plan includes, over a relatively short period, making all cars electric and all homes totally electric.

Since their plan appears to be completely eliminate the use of fossil fuels, it can be assumed that cars, trucks, farm machinery, heavy equipment, trains, planes, ships, etc. would be included. In addition to homes there would be restaurants, stores, factories, steel mills, aluminum plants, hospitals, etc.

The next point deals with the fact that not only will you have a vast number of wind turbines and solar panel fields to deal with, but just think of all the new power lines they will create. Just think of all the substations it will require to gather the electricity and send it to where it is needed. Just think of all the electrical points along the highways that will be required to recharge vehicle batteries.

What I have said here may not be 100% accurate but it is enough to indicate that the people of this area have a

lot more to be concerned about visually than a few transmission towers on Idaho Power's B2H proposal.

I have an anonymous email from a few years back where someone wrote the obituary for common sense. Based on the direction the present administration is going I would say the email was correct, and common sense is dead.

Dick Culley
Baker City

Some people too selfish to help city return to normal

Bravo to Gary Dielman and Cindy Birko for sharing their views regarding the attitudes of the local stupidheads who are the biggest problems facing us in Baker in getting our lives back to normal. I am so disgusted with the lack of intelligence many in the community apparently possess and the flagrant city council members lack of leadership. Shame on you all. I wear a mask for you but you are too selfish to help our city get back to normal.

Robin Raskin
Baker City

Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest.
- 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.

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Flames transform a formerly familiar landscape

I didn't believe a patch of blackened tree stumps could shock me.

I suppose I ought to have known better.

I should have understood that no number of conversations or photographs or social media videos could affect me as viscerally as seeing those stumps myself, and being nearly close enough to smell the acrid stench of charred fir bark.

This epiphany happened on a recent evening as I drove west on Highway 22 in the canyon of the North Santiam River in Marion County.

The spot was about five miles upcanyon from Mill City, where my parents live.

Drive another 16 miles beyond Mill City and you'd be in Stayton, where I grew up.

Almost eight months after the Labor Day weekend fires devastated several parts of Western Oregon, including the North Santiam Canyon, I visited the place where I spent my first 18 years.

It would be hyperbole to say I no longer recognized what once was familiar.

But I needn't indulge in even a whit of exaggeration to say both that this canyon is a much different place than when I last saw it, in August 2019, and that not in my lifetime will I ever see it as I once did.

For the better part of a year I had been anticipating the sights.

My parents, whose riverside



JAYSON JACOBY

house was not damaged, have narrated on multiple phone calls over the months what they've seen while driving around. Both have lived in the area their entire lives, giving them a perspective, and a sense of things forever lost, that make my own seem paltry.

Their descriptions, I now know having seen some of the places for myself, were certainly accurate.

I was dismayed by the detritus.

We drove through only a small portion of the damaged area but it was a depressing experience. The sadness was cumulative as we rolled past yet another heap of ashes and flame-sculpted metal that wouldn't be recognizable as the site of a building if not for the concrete foundation that alone survived.

It strikes me as indescribably cruel that fire, in what must have been a matter of minutes, could turn a family's most valuable possession into something so ugly, fit only to be dumped into a pit, so much worthless trash.

And yet nothing I saw affected me so powerfully, though it wasn't so depressing, as that one patch of stumps. It's on the south side of the highway. What struck me was not just the stumps — I had seen thou-

sands of burned trees during the previous 15 miles or so — but what the absence of the former stand of tall Douglas-firs had revealed.

This is the east end of a loop road that runs through a residential area. I have driven past the spot probably 100 times. I don't recall ever even noticing the street sign, which is much less conspicuous than the one at the west terminus of the loop.

At least it was much less conspicuous.

Not now, with its coniferous cloak stripped away.

In those few seconds as I steered my car through the highway curve I might have believed, before reality reasserted itself, that I was not where I knew myself to be.

It was disconcerting.

I sensed the mindless, primeval force that is fire, its terrible power to not only rob people of what they cherish, but even to steal, in effect, their memories of what was not merely familiar but perhaps, or so we innocently believed, was even perpetual.

The Elkhorn Mountains are lying to me. Again.

This repeated prevarication is particularly troubling because I consider the Elkhorns my friend, to the extent that an inanimate object can play such a role, and no lie cuts

quite so deeply as the one committed by someone we care for.

The Elkhorns are misleading me — and I presume many others who, as people are wont to do, look frequently at the mountains — about the amount of snow still packed into its forested nooks and crannies.

I get a fine view of the Elkhorns each day, except ones heavy of cloud, while driving home from work, westward along Auburn Avenue.

The vantage point, however, contributes to the illusion.

I see, and quite prominently, slopes that tend to shed their snow relatively early in spring. These are places so rocky and steep that snow never accumulates to any great depth, or that, owing to their southerly exposure, absorb a lot of snow-melting sunlight.

These two factors, and in some places the combination of the two, erase the white from swathes of the Elkhorns, particularly on the south side of Hunt Mountain and above the North Fork of Pine Creek.

The other day, as I crossed the railroad tracks on a sunny afternoon, I noticed bare patches near the top of Hunt Mountain's shoulder, an elevation of nearly 8,000 feet.

But just a few days earlier I hiked up the Rock Creek road, just north of Hunt Mountain.

And although much of the route was below 5,500 feet elevation, the

snow still lay in drifts three or four feet deep.

But those drifts along the road can't be seen from the valley.

Over the years I've come to recognize the fallacy of what I see from town. More than once I've driven to the Elkhorns, anticipating an early hike based on a misreading of the scene, only to find my intended route buried by the firm and grainy snow of April or May (or, some years, June).

My homeward view sometimes still leads me astray, albeit briefly.

But I have a bellwether of sorts that has proved to be far more reliable than a cursory glance at the Elkhorns' east slopes. I look at the point where Hunt Mountain juts farthest to the east, and in particular its north side. In a year with a snow-pack that's near to average, there will still be snow in that spot on May 18 — I use that date because, being the anniversary of the 1980 eruption of Mt. St. Helens, I seem to be able to remember it.

On the day I was taken aback a bit by the snowless areas, after I was home I stepped into my yard and made a more thorough examination. What I saw is that on the sheltered north slopes, snow still speckles the dark background of the forests well down Hunt Mountain. Those lingering drifts tell a much truer tale than the bare sedimentary brows elsewhere on the peak.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.