

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Open up government

Residents in The Dalles and The Oregonian newspaper are in an indirect fight over secrecy with Google. They want to know more about the company's water use.

Google wants to expand its data centers in The Dalles. Water helps keep data centers cool. And to expand its data centers, Google needs The Dalles to expand its water system.

Google is offering to pay The Dalles \$28.5 million to do so. Some residents wonder what that will mean for the future of water in the area. How good a deal is it? Oregonian reporter Mike Rogoway asked the city for a record of how much water Google used last year.

The city's answer: no.

Rogoway asked the Wasco District Attorney to rule on the matter. He ruled the information was a public record.

On Oct. 30, the city of The Dalles filed suit to keep Google's water use a secret.

The city essentially argued Google's water use is a trade secret. Oregon law conditionally exempts trade secrets from disclosure unless the public interest requires disclosure.

The following passage in Oregon's public records manual is instructive. It's long: "In assessing whether the public interest requires the disclosure of trade secrets, we typically look to how much harm the entity asserting a trade secret would suffer by disclosure; the benefits enjoyed by that entity in connection with submitting the information at issue; and the nature of the governmental activity connected to the information. For example, we concluded that the public interest required disclosure of salary information of private companies that had received sizable property tax abatements: even assuming the information qualified as trade secret, we found that disclosure would help the public monitor the effectiveness of this investment of public funds tied to job creation..."

The public's interest in Google's water use is clear. First, Oregon's public records law favors disclosure, not secrecy.

There is also absolutely no question that the public in The Dalles would like to know more about the deal their government is doing with Google. Without knowing the details of Google's water use, the public cannot judge the performance of its elected officials in creating the deal.

Google's water use has been reported in other states. That doesn't necessarily have a bearing on what should happen in Oregon. It is useful to know.

Where would Oregonians be if companies get tax breaks or make deals with government that involve public spending but can keep the details hidden? Oregonians would live in a state of secrets and silence, not of open government.

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

OTHER VIEWS

Who benefits from River Democracy Act?

By LYNN FINDLEY and MARK OWENS

Sen. Ron Wyden has proposed adding over 4,700 miles of waterways to the federal Wild & Scenic Rivers System in Oregon. With half-mile no-touch buffers, the "Rivers Democracy Act" will apply access and management restrictions to three million acres of federal land, much of it in our communities in Northeastern Oregon. There are significant issues still unaddressed and important questions still unanswered for such a consequential bill that is now moving through the U.S. Senate.

For starters, there are no detailed maps available from federal agencies that allow Oregonians to see where these designations are located, and how these designations would affect

private property, public access, and other traditional uses such as ranching. The only available map on the Internet appears to be produced by a Portland environmental group that helped write the bill.

Secondly, the original Wild & Scenic Rivers Act was intended to preserve certain rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values in a free-flowing condition. From a list provided by the bill's supporters, we know that 85 percent of the bill's Wild & Scenic designations would be applied to small creeks, gulches, draws and unnamed tributaries — many of which are not free-flowing and do not even carry water throughout the year.

If these small creeks, gulches, draws and unnamed tributaries are worthy of such a designation, why

does this bill subvert the careful administrative study and review process under the original act? And why does this bill impose half-mile buffers in these areas, when the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act only calls for quarter-mile buffers?

Federal lands are at high risk of wildfire and need active management, thinning and fuels reduction work. Wildfires in recent years have scorched watersheds and degraded water quality as sediment and ash is deposited into our river systems. In 2020, over 76 percent of acres burned in Oregon occurred on lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management.

Management is already restricted in riparian areas. Would imposing even more restrictions through Wild & Scenic designations and half-

mile buffers really make it easier to reduce wildfire risks?

Oregonians are right to ask why the River Democracy Act will add more restrictions to three million acres at a time when land management agencies are already struggling to implement proven and proactive forest management activities to reduce the risks of wildfires to forests and watersheds.

The reasons for agency inaction include a lack of funding and personnel, and the cost and time it takes them to satisfy exhaustive analysis and regulatory requirements. In addition to the half-mile buffers, the River Democracy Act will require agencies to prepare exhaustive river management plans that will take years to complete, drain agency resources, and open the door to ongo-

ing and additional litigation.

Proponents of the bill claim the Rivers Democracy Act will support wildfire prevention efforts and protect private property rights. Yet history shows that Wild & Scenic River designations only encourage more lawsuits and analysis paralysis, especially where they intersect with private property and other public land uses.

As this bill advances through Congress, citizens should be asking: what does the bill actually do, why is it necessary, and does it really benefit rural and frontier Oregon?

Senator Lynn Findley (Senate District 30) and Representative Mark Owens (House District 60) represent Eastern Oregon in the state legislature.



Honoring our veterans on their day

And just like that, the calendar, once again, turns to Veterans Day.

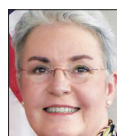
For me, like many of my fellow veterans, Oregonians and Americans, it is a time to reflect and take stock. One year ago, we "gathered" for a Veterans Day unlike any before it, in a virtual environment that gave us some flexibilities that we never had before, but we had to forego the warmth of being with other people.

Now, as we cautiously return to an environment more closely resembling normalcy, it's appropriate to take stock of all that we have to celebrate. We as a country have much to be thankful for, and much of it is thanks to our veterans who fought for freedom and stood guard over our peace, and to our fallen heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice.

We remember our World War II veterans, the sadly dwindling "Greatest Generation," who have much to still teach us about the importance of self-sacrifice to a greater cause. Some 80 years ago, these brave men and women left their homes and families to answer the call — not only for their own country, but the world.

We honor our Korean War veterans, who fought in the "Forgotten War," which came so soon after the Second World War that it is often overlooked. In a foreign land, they endured freezing conditions and disease in addition to an unrelenting enemy, often against impossible odds, and made a lasting contribution to world peace and prosperity.

We thank our Vietnam War veterans, who, regrettably, did not receive the heroes' welcome that they deserved upon returning home from battle, and this remains a painful stain on our



KELLY FITZPATRICK

national memory that we must work hard to erase. Yet, these remarkable men and women refused to turn their backs on their fellow veterans. Vowing that another generation of service members would never face what they had to endure, many of them remain engaged in serving their fellow veterans.

We remember our veterans who represent the peacetime era, serving under the near-constant specter of the Cold War and prepared to confront any enemy that might threaten national security around the globe. Many of them engaged in so-called "small wars" in Grenada, or other military operations in far-flung nations such as Bosnia, Somalia and a host of other nations on the African continent.

And, we honor our veterans of the conflicts of the Middle East and Afghanistan. Many of these veterans entered the Armed Forces in the wake of the terrible attack on September 11, 2001, and fought and sacrificed to ensure that the United States would not experience similar attacks.

Thankfulness, gratitude, honor and remembrance: This is the duty and responsibility of all Americans who have not worn the uniform — and it is these principles that are embodied in the more than 75-year tradition of Veterans Day.

Originally known as Armistice Day, the occasion celebrated the Allied victory in World War II. It was motivated by a simple, two-word phrase from the heart of our country: "Thank you."

Gratitude is a simple yet powerful thing. It has a way of humbling us, bettering us and reminding us of what's most important.

We have much to be thankful for: The freedoms and way of life that we have long enjoyed, the peace that has been secured for our children and grandchildren — it is our veterans and service members we have to thank for that: Brave men and women who answered the call, ready to face the fire and, if necessary, pay the ultimate price on our behalf.

That's my message this Veterans Day, and every day, to all who wore the uniform, regardless of branch, era, rank, duties, race, ethnicity, gender identity or sexual orientation, religion, creed or ability: Thank you for your service.

Please consider joining me and ODVA for our Oregon Statewide Veterans Day Ceremony, which will take place at 2 p.m. Nov. 10 — the day before Veterans Day — at Oregon State Capitol Park, directly across from the front entrance of the Capitol Building.

The event will take place in person and outdoors, with social distancing and mask requirements in place. It will also be livestreamed on ODVA's Facebook page at facebook.com/odvavet.

Kelly Fitzpatrick is the director of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs and Governor Kate Brown's policy advisor on veterans' issues. She is a retired Army officer. Her military awards and decorations include multiple awards of the Meritorious Service Medal, the Southwest Asia Service Medal and the Army Parachutist Badge.

Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- 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.

- Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.

- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be

published.

- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

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