

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

When 'The Oregon Way' doesn't work

Democratic Oregon lawmakers claim they can draw legislative maps to favor individuals.

That statement seems preposterous. It would be gerrymandering at some of its most gerrymanderingist.

And yet, it's just what lawyers for the Legislature say.

Their argument, reported thanks to the work of *The Oregonian*, comes in response to a lawsuit challenging the way state House districts were drawn. Two voters alleged that the districts violated restrictions on not dividing communities of interest and protecting an incumbent. Rep. Marty Wilde, D-Eugene, believes his precinct was put into a district that leans Republican to hurt his ability to challenge state Democratic Sen. Floyd Prozanski and because Wilde criticized the way Democrats drew legislative maps.

Some states embed a detailed prohibition against gerrymandering in their state constitutions. Oregon doesn't. Oregon's Constitution only says districts must be equal in population. Other issues such as not dividing communities of interest or playing favorites with individuals have only been in state statutes.

What the lawyers argue is that Oregon legislators passed a law to redraw the state's legislative districts. And when they passed the new law, it superseded any old law that may conflict with it. They aren't claiming that districts were drawn to favor individuals and that's OK. They are claiming it would be OK under the law.

We are not lawyers. We don't know if a court will buy that argument or not. But it is not what state officials and legislators have been telling Oregonians.

When Shemia Fagan was running for secretary of state and talked about gerrymandering, she said Oregon law strictly prohibits (partisan gerrymandering) by "drawing district lines to benefit any political party, incumbent or person..."

Now? Well, Fagan has been silent.

Gov. Kate Brown has defined "The Oregon Way" as coming together at the table to find common ground, to the mutual benefit of us all.

We don't dispute there's something to that. And when it happens, it's something to be proud of.

But there is also a different Oregon Way. It's the one where Oregon politicians tell the public one thing and actually, another thing is true. It happened recently with the state's new death penalty law, which made the death penalty in the state far more restrictive. Legislators — even authors of the legislation and Gov. Brown — claimed it would not be retroactive and change previous convictions. It does.

And now again, Oregonians were told by their leaders that one thing is true about gerrymandering and it is not true.

Wonder why so many people get disgusted with politicians? That is why.

There should be little question that it is a conflict of interest for lawmakers to draw the boundaries of their own districts. A ballot initiative would have changed that and put in place an independent redistricting commission to draw the legislative maps.

Would that fix all the problems with redistricting? We doubt it. But it's getting harder to argue Oregon's lawmakers deserve to keep this power for themselves.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.



Your views

No reason to ask mayor to avoid voting on council vacancy

Once again the Baker City Council meetings have become the playground for petty bickering and squabbles. Calls have been made for the mayor to recuse herself from voting on the council vacancy. But why is that? Is it because a law has been broken? Is it because policy has been violated? Is it because her ethics are suspect? The answer to all such questions is a resounding no.

Whatever the reason for asking the mayor to not do her job of weighing in on the decision for a council position she and other councilors will have to work with while guiding our city, I don't think the solution to an alleged personal conflict of interests is to ask the mayor to act against the public interest. In what world does that make sense? I believe everyone on the Baker City Council wants the best for our community. However, I must support Mayor McQuisten and Councilors Dixon and Waggoner in their position on this matter.

It seems to me that if candidates for councilors cannot be approved after numerous rounds of voting, then time is better served soliciting new applicants rather than trying to shoehorn perennial candidates into public office through muckraking and catty accusations from their friends and proxies. The Old Guard might want a reunion tour of the good ol' days (that budget records might reflect were not so good

after all), but the rest of Baker City is more concerned with our City Council's time not being used as a public soap box for personal gripes, grudges, and sour grapes.

Nathan Hogdon
Baker City

Lease for Interpretive Center temporary site beneficial

The recently announced lease agreement between the Bureau of Land Management and Baker County, enabling the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center to be temporarily housed in the Baker Heritage Museum while the Interpretive Center undergoes extensive retrofitting to the building and its HVAC systems is good news. Good news for Baker County and Baker City, good news for the BLM and the museum, and good news for tourists visiting the area.

The Baker County Museum Commission is excited to partner with the Interpretive Center staff to offer the visiting public an experience to be remembered. The BLM is constructing new exhibits to fit into the museum's Leo Adler Room and in part of the ballroom upstairs. Although the Center's exhibits will necessarily be scaled down from what we have known for the past nearly 30 years, this partnership will ensure that visitors receive a quality experience.

As the nation recovers economi-

cally from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism industry is rebounding strongly. Having Interpretive Center staff and exhibits in the museum will undoubtedly assist in Baker County's economic recovery as visitors are drawn into Baker City. An added attraction is that the BLM will offer an array of excellent interpretive programs and performances in Geiser-Pollman Park on weekends and holidays, weather permitting. The museum's education programs will be enhanced by the presence of BLM staff, and visitors to Baker County's summer events will have a value-added experience.

The Baker County Museum Commission appreciates the support of the Baker County Commissioners, the BLM, Base Camp Baker, the Oregon Trail Preservation Trust, and the Baker County Economic Development Department in making this extraordinary partnership possible.

Cammy Warner, Chair
Diana Brown, Vice-chair
Rebecca Kolbet
Secretary/Treasurer
Chelsea Blatchford
Museum Commissioner
Dave Hunsaker
Museum Commissioner
Teresa McQuisten
Museum Commissioner
Bill Mitchell
Museum Commissioner

OTHER VIEWS

Infrastructure bill: Don't merely spend, but build well and wisely

Editorial from The New York Daily News:

After all the speeches out on the cold White House South Lawn, at 4:21 Monday afternoon, Nov. 15, President Biden took but a few seconds to sign the bipartisan infrastructure bill into law. That brief moment, built on cooperation among senators from both parties, should have happened long ago. We don't just mean earlier this year, but in the last, horrible administration of the horrible Donald Trump or even before him.

Real investments in roads and bridges and ports and transit have been needed for many years, and it's something in which America once led the world. Now, we're the laggard with new competitors like China churning

out high-speed rail and new airports while we plod along on the aging systems put in place by our distant predecessors.

But it's not only about just printing money in Washington and dropping it across the country. It must be used wisely and economically. Projects, from expanded broadband to upgraded water delivery and sewage disposal to those roads and bridges and rails, must be worthwhile. And crucially, they must stay in budget and on schedule.

Jobs are great and good jobs are greater and good union construction jobs are the greatest to many, especially to politicians running for reelection. But as we said before, there's a big difference between spending and building.

You can spend \$1 million or \$1 billion or \$1 trillion to hire crews to dig a hole (a \$1 trillion one would be very, very big), generating a payroll and getting those bulldozers bulldozing. You could then spend the same amount to hire the equivalent crews to fill it in. You've now produced a huge investment in construction jobs, but have no improved infrastructure allowing for economic growth and greater efficiencies in moving people or goods or ideas.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer on Monday touted the biggest boondoggle in the country, Gateway, now estimated by Amtrak at \$33.7 billion. It's a lot of money to spend, even just the \$14 billion zero-capacity Phase 1 being considered, but it fails the smart investment test.

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Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read: oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us; 350 Winter St. NE, Suite 100, Salem OR 97301-3896; 503-378-4000.

Oregon Attorney General Ellen F. Rosenblum: Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.

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

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

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. Mayor

Kerry McQuisten, Councilors Jason Spriet, Shane Alderson, Joanna Dixon, Heather Sells and Johnny Waggoner Sr.

Baker City administration: 541-523-6541. Jonathan Cannon, city manager; Ty Duby, police chief; Sean Lee, fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

Baker County Commission: Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.

Baker County departments: 541-523-8200. Travis Ash, sheriff; Noodle Perkins, roadmaster; Greg Baxter, district attorney; Alice Durflinger, county treasurer; Stefanie Kirby, county clerk; Kerry Savage, county assessor.

Baker School District: 2090 4th Street, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-524-2260; fax 541-524-2564. Superintendent: Mark Witty. Board meets the third Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m. Council Chambers, Baker City Hall, 1655 First St.; Andrew Bryan, Jessica Dougherty, Chris Hawkins, Travis Cook and Julie Huntington.