

## EDITORIAL

Public records  
and real numbers

Ninety million dollars. It's a lot of money. It's the number Adam Crawford, external relations director for the state's Department of Administrative Services, used last week about the cost of public records. He said that's what he thought Oregon might be spending to give media organizations and others public records at reduced cost or free.

"I think the number may be even higher," Crawford replied, when he was challenged on it by another member of the Oregon Public Records Advisory Council. The discussion then quickly shifted away.

If it really is \$90 million or more, it's a mighty sum that Crawford pointed out the state is transferring, in part, to for-profit companies.

But when we later asked him about that number, it seemed an educated guess. He didn't make it clear where it came from. He did mention a survey of state agencies from 2018. It said agencies fulfilled roughly 25,000 public records requests and charged under \$150,000 for doing that, waiving all other staff and legal costs.

Would that add up to \$90 million? Maybe. Maybe not.

If Crawford believes that number is right, though, and he's a member of the executive team of a key state agency, journalists and the public should not be surprised when they face enormous fees when they ask for public records. Government officials may believe they are simply giving away too much at the cost of other state priorities.

Public agencies can charge reasonable fees for public records in Oregon. They don't have to. They can waive some or all of the cost. Charging high fees can be the same as denying a request. What should be charged and who should pay it is at the heart of the questions the state committee, the Oregon Public Records Advisory Council, is looking at, as Crawford said.

For government bodies, releasing public records isn't just a matter of doing a computer search, the computer spits out the records and then the government can hand them over in minutes. State and local government agencies don't always have the most modern computers. The state is in the process of upgrading many outdated systems. The old systems weren't designed to make public records searches easy.

There can also be a problem with how information is stored. Releasable information can be stored mixed in with personal information that should not be disclosed. Scouring records and redacting personal information takes time and effort. Who should pay for that?

And there can be issues when people take on new roles volunteering to serve on government committees. They can end up using their personal email accounts when they email about government business. Those particular emails would be public records. That would mean the volunteers would have to compile them and hand them over if requested. If some of the emails didn't show them in the best light, would they?

What is the solution? That's what Oregon's Public Records Advisory Council is working on. Real numbers should be the foundation of the discussion.

*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.*

## 2022 DEMOCRAT STRATEGY



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## YOUR VIEWS

Commissioners need to  
stick to county business,  
not politics

My name is Christine Howard. My husband, Casey Howard, and I have been residents of Baker County for over 40 years.

We are concerned about the attempts by far right extremist groups coming to Baker and attempting to make radical changes to how our county does its business and to the character of the county as a whole.

We are opposed to the efforts by both individuals, and such groups as Baker County United, becoming involved in the running of our county.

Our expectations are that the County Commissioners are elected to take care of Baker County business, not politics. We thank you for your years of service and hard work in doing the busi-

ness of the county in a non-political manner.

Christine and Casey  
Howard  
Baker City

Bentz misses mark in  
claiming election was  
fraudulent

Rep. Clifford Bentz says the 2020 election was fraudulent. He cites information written in the Federalist that a group of people with money to do so, donated funds to the Center for Tech and Civic Life.

First, The Center for Tech and Civic Life is an organization of and for election workers across the country. It offers courses for how to conduct safe and secure elections. Anyone can go into their website and check out the courses they offer for election workers. I recommend doing that before ac-

cepting Mr. Bentz's word that the CTCL acted to influence people to vote a certain way or for election workers to swing the election one way or another.

Next, I found an article from another organization that calls itself 2022 Influence Watch that has information about what the CTCL has done. If the information is correct, it is specific as to where funding went to electoral offices around the country. I did not see any proof in their article that proves that the CTCL is in any way partisan. I question the assertion in the 2022 Influence Watch article that names the CTCL as a "left-wing" group.

I disagree with Mr. Bentz. One, the Federalist is a mouthpiece for the Republican party. It is not in any way a non-partisan publication. Two, I find it illogical to infer

that the Center for Tech and Civic Life turned the election in favor of President Biden. The Center's aim is to provide information to election workers about doing their job fairly and effectively. It is not logical to say that President Trump lost just because of the training given. Anyone can check the content of the training to discern whether it favored any candidate.

My conclusions are: Giving a person or group a name, such as "left-wing" or "right-wing" does not provide the validity or non-validity of that person or group. "Correlation does not equal causation" is still the case in any logical argument. I would also infer that Mr. Bentz believes that any election is fraudulent in which his candidate is not the victor.

Evelyn Swart  
Joseph

## CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

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**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.

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**Oregon Gov. Kate Brown:** 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; www.governor.oregon.gov.

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**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. Councilors Jason Spriet,

Kerry McQuisten, Shane Alderson, Joanna Dixon, Heather Sells and Johnny Waggoner Sr. and Dean Guyer.

**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 Durlflinger, 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.; Chris Hawkins, Andrew Bryan, Travis Cook, Jessica Dougherty, Julie Huntington.

## In rumpiled topography, not every mile is equal

Two-dimensional map never seems quite so useless, so starkly ignorant of the hard reality of the our planet's pimpled surface, as in that instant when the only thing sparing you from a nasty tumble is the toe of your right boot.

Which is wedged between a stem of sagebrush and a fist-size stone on a slope approximately as steep as the north face of the Eiger.

A situation, to put it another way, that's about as precarious as that facing the Joe Pesci character in the last 20 minutes of a Martin Scorsese film.

We understand, of course, that a 2-D map can't completely convey the decidedly 3-D world.

The absence of that third dimension is significant.

Maps are flat. Baker County, at least outside the paved, civilized towns and valleys, rarely is.

I had occasion, on a Sunday this past November, to ponder this matter in both a theoretical sense, over a cup of breakfast coffee with my brothers-in-law, and in the immediate and tangible predicament I found myself in on that nearly vertical hillside.

My wife Lisa's brothers, Chuck and Dave Britton, are Baker City natives who now live in the Portland area.

They had driven over to hunt elk in the Lookout Mountain unit, a tradition that their dad, Howard Britton, started about a decade and a half ago.

They invited me to come along although my aptitude as a hunter is about the same as my aptitude for calculus. Which is to say — and as multiple math teachers who had the misfortune of drawing my name for their class would attest — approximately zero. I suspect I'm a somewhat welcome companion largely because there's little to no chance that I'll interfere with anybody else's hunt by doing something loony. Shooting an elk, for instance.

We were chatting, Chuck and Dave and I, before embarking on the day's hunt.

Chuck asked me if I had heard of what you might call "flattening the map."

I said that's an idea I have pondered often, and that I find endlessly fascinating as a conceptual exercise, however impractical it might be.

The basic idea is to take a piece of ground with the type of rumpiled topography common to Baker County, and to estimate how much more space, in acres or square miles or some other 2-D measurement, that piece would sprawl across if you



Jayson  
Jacoby

could account for all the ups and downs.

Very much more space, we all agreed, if the ground in question is as rugged as the Lookout Mountain unit.

We also speculated that, given the capabilities of computers, it ought not be terribly complicated to come up with a pretty fair approximation of what you'd have if you could, in effect, flatten every ridge, butte and pinnacle.

Regardless, it's a compelling thought experiment.

Later in the day, Dave and I — he had his rifle and I brought along a shotgun in case we came across some chukars interested in embarrassing me — had a more practical experience with the gaping difference between map and ground.

Over five hours or so we hunted an area of no more than three square miles.

A basic map — one that doesn't include contour lines, which depict the topography — reduces such an area to a trifle. Any reasonably fit

person can walk a couple miles in well under an hour.

Dave had his GPS receiver, which displays topographic maps. These come rather nearer the truth — the closer the contour lines, for instance, the steeper the slope.

But even the most detailed topographic map can't convey just how much land can be crammed into one square mile.

An awful lot more than a mile, according to my calves and thighs, which were still complaining a couple days later.

Dave and I, despite the seemingly modest distance implied by a map, climbed from the bottom of one gulch to the top of a ridge, and then repeated this twice more.

In each case the top of the ridge was several hundred feet above the draw.

This terrain is typical of eastern Baker County, where erosion has gouged deeply into the land, leaving a landscape of immense proportions that make the map scale seem ludicrously inadequate.

As we made our grueling, tendon- and ligament-straining way, I thought about our conversation a couple hours before, a time my abused ligaments and tendons, I have no doubt, thought of with a nostalgic fondness.

I tried to imagine compressing all the ground we had covered, the knee-punishing descents and the lung-expanding climbs, smashing it and rolling it flat as a baker would do with a mound of bread dough.

My brain, which struggles with concepts that don't involve clauses and sentences, couldn't create a distinct mental picture of this terrain ironing.

But it was easy to understand that the sheer verticality of the place makes it much larger, for anyone who gets around on the ground (I never envy the birds quite so much as in such terrain), than those neat cartographic lines denoting each square mile suggest.

Einstein, among his many achievements, recognized that time isn't quite the predictably linear thing which we of lesser intellect suppose it to be, assuming we even think of it in such terms.

It seems to me that anyone who thinks of land solely, or largely, based on a map, doesn't grasp the nature of Earth's surface.

Not every mile, suffice it to say, is created equal.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.