

## EDITORIAL

## Public records law needs disclaimer

Oregon's public records law should come with a disclaimer. It should be like one of those car ads on the radio where after you hear about the deal, the announcer goes rapid fire through all the conditions that can make you wonder how good a deal it really is.

That's because Oregon law discriminates against people on access to public records.

If you are rich or have a rich backer, the fees for getting access to public records are no problem. If you are not rich or work for a company that makes slim profits or no profits, Oregon's law essentially says you are not worthy of the same level of access to records that are purportedly public.

Oregon's Public Records Advisory Council is developing legislation aimed at improving the equality of access.

Children get public education in Oregon, no matter what their socio-economic status. You get to check books out of the public library, no matter what your socio-economic status. But access to public records, that is based on your ability to pay. Of course, a lot of things are like that. It's hard for most people to find the time and money to pay a lot of attention to what's going on in local, state or national government and try to influence it. Being rich helps. Being poor certainly does not.

A police report. Details about new development in your neighborhood. Plans for trails along the river. Those are all things the public has a right to. All those things are usually pretty easy to get and at low or no cost.

What if you want records that show the negotiations with big tech company over home much water it will use in its new plant in Hood River? What if you want all the records that show how the police interacted leading up to a protest at Pilot Butte? What if you are worried your government is doing something it shouldn't? Do you think getting access to those records would be easy or cheap? Most likely not. People with money would be able to at least try. The barrier of fees would stop some from even trying.

Oregon's Public Records Advisory Council has been holding meetings and listening to testimony about this issue for months. Last week, it talked about what possible legislation might say.

One big change: Requester tiers. The type of requester would change what could be charged. Commercial interests would have to pay for the actual cost of any searching, duplication and review of documents. Media and public interest organizations, educational and non-commercial scientific organizations would only have to pay for duplication. Anyone else, including members of the general public, would have to pay for search and duplication.

One additional requirement that is being considered is no fees for a requester's own files or records. Another is that fees would be waived or reduced by at least 25% if the requester is a member of the media and the request is made in the public interest. There's much more to the proposal than we have listed. You can see a draft in very preliminary form here, [tinyurl.com/PRACchanges](https://tinyurl.com/PRACchanges).

A clear outcome of such changes is that costs of public records would shift from individual members of the public seeking information to government, which of course, is funded by the public as a whole. It may also increase demand for records because requesters would not have to pay as much. That may increase the burden on government staff with more requests. But if they are public records, shouldn't the law ensure all the members of the public has reasonable access to them?

You can see more about the Public Records Advisory Council here, [tinyurl.com/ORprac](https://tinyurl.com/ORprac).

■ *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.*



## YOUR VIEWS

### People should keep their religious beliefs to themselves

Thank you for rattling my cage, Richard Fox, you can now stop with the "my god is the answer" nonsense, your "read exodus 20," your "god's laws," your convoluted "ten commandments/Constitution" insane comparison and your pursuant personal beliefs because they make no sense and mean absolutely nothing to me or anyone. Why is it so hard for some people to keep their, and "only" their god, out of other people's faces? What our country needs saving from is crazy fanatical Christian zealots. Only thing worse than someone shoveling their religious gobbledegoon in other's faces is possibly insurance companies or robocalls. I will now retreat to my cage, Mr. Fox, with complete confidence that you will soon be going door to door with little pamphlets.

This brings me to Mr. Dick Culley who has, to this very day, failed to realize that no one is going to take his gun, no one has ever taken his gun and no one will, probably,

ever take his gun. Nothing more than the classic go to rhetoric of the radical right. Typically containing conspiracies about the deep state and how they want your automatic weapon so they can have total control! Yes sir this is the year! Give it up please! I love the talk of the sanctity of our Constitution as the beloved Retrupmican party destroys that very document piece by piece. It is very easy to see who's wreaking havoc on our democracy, rights and freedoms. ... get your head out of the sand, away from the Fox "entertainment" channel and embrace some truth and facts.

In other news, anyone avoiding or ignoring the January 6th Committee hearings and its importance to the protection of our democracy is either politically embarrassed, embraces totalitarianism or is completely blinded by hate and misconceptions. And oh yes. ... you have the right to move to Idaho. ... please.

Mike Meyer  
Baker City

### Thank you to staff for maintaining Mount Hope cemetery, park

This letter is to thank the wonderful staff (Eric) and company for all the help they provided our family for Memorial Day and also for a recent burial at Mount Hope Cemetery. The cemetery looked as good as we have ever seen it. The grounds were very beautiful. From the first time we contacted Eric he was so attentive to all of our needs. We have 28 graves we decorate every year. Having water available at so many locations was also a huge plus.

We also used the Lions Club covered area at the beautiful Geiser-Pollman Park for a family reunion and there was Mr. Eric, again making sure we had electricity, water and tables.

Thanks to all of you on the Baker City staff very much.

Jean Hayes  
Baker City  
Sue Conklyn  
Preston, Idaho

### Republicans forcing women to decide between bad options

Well, Republicans have once again reaffirmed to whom

their loyalties lie. This time they have ignored the happy, healthy lives of future generations, and given in to the deep pockets of the oil and coal giants. Young women will have to live under the umbrella of bad choices or no choice at all, about their lives, deciding if life without choice is really worth living. I have never before in my life seen more hypocrisy than displayed by so called evangelical Christians, who believe the only freedoms we should have are the ones they think we should have. Liars in the Supreme Court. I usually don't like to point fingers, but it is apparent now that they have only one goal in mind, and that is to make the entire country believe their way is the right way. It is time to stand up and say NO, not today.

I am not an overly religious person, but I believe if there is a God, he meant for us all to choose the way of life we live, right or wrong, follow your own feelings, and suffer the consequences, good or bad.

Don Worley  
Baker City

## COLUMN

## Verbal warning has desired effect on my driving

I watched in my rear-view mirror as the steel gray Oregon State Police car pulled a U-turn on Auburn Avenue and started heading toward me.

The lights on the patrol car's roof began to flash.

My pulse kicked into a higher gear even as my right hand shifted the transmission in my Mazda to a lower one.

I turned onto Ninth Street just west of the railroad tracks, pulled to the side of the gravel road, turned off the engine and awaited my fate.

My luck in such situations has been universally bad.

(So has my discretion, it scarcely needs to be said, given that there's rarely any valid defense against a minor traffic infraction.)

Every time I've been detained by an officer, I've driven away not with a warning, either of the verbal or written variety, but rather with a ticket on which a dollar amount had been scrawled.

I expected this encounter would end in the same ignominious way.

I knew I had been driving faster than 25 mph, which is the posted limit on the stretch of Auburn west of the tracks.

I could hardly plead ignorance (a tactic which in any case has never spared me a summons in the past) since I drive the street at least four times most days, and half a dozen or more relatively often.

The speed limit sign is quite conspicuous, with nary a stray tree branch to conceal it.

I was driving back to work after lunch. It occurred to me, as I sat there waiting for the trooper to arrive, that I had been stuck in that mental stupor peculiar to the immediate post-lunch period — hunger satiated, and fixated on the tasks that would occupy my afternoon.

It's not that I was distracted, per se — I'm confident that I was quite capable of taking evasive action had a pedestrian sprinted



Jayson Jacoby

onto the street from a side street or a pickup truck wandered into my lane.

I had, rather, succumbed to the insidious sensation that masks speed, that makes 35 feel identical to 25.

Given my history with traffic laws, I was resigned to accepting my ticket.

I figured I deserved it — but not only because I was exceeding the limit.

I live along that section of Auburn and I frequently mutter expletives to myself — or whoever is unfortunate to be within range of my wrath — when a vehicle rolls by my house at an obviously extralegal speed.

Sometimes I can tell this because I'm in the yard or the driveway and I actually see the offending car race by. I don't have any special skill at estimated vehicle speeds, to be sure. But 25 mph is a modest velocity, and if a car is whizzing by at, say, 40, you don't need keen senses to gauge the discrepancy.

Other times I'm indoors and it's the sound that betrays the speeder.

(I acknowledge that irresponsible muffler maintenance can, through sheer volume, mislead the listener about how fast a car is going. But the Doppler effect is awfully convincing no matter how obnoxious an exhaust system happens to be.)

I have a personal stake in the traffic on Auburn, to be sure.

My wife's parents live directly across the street from our house, and my daughter, Olivia, and son, Max, have walked across the street hundreds of times, from their first tentative steps, grasping the hand of a parent or grandparent, to now, when they both get across the pavement with an alacrity and smoothness that my decrepit joints have been unable to manage at least since

the Obama administration.

Yet I still worry, the perpetual plague of parenthood.

In that horrific mental cinema that plays occasionally for every parent, in terrible Technicolor and organ-rearranging Dolby surround sound, I imagine a car careening around the curve where Auburn gives onto 17th Street at the moment that one of my kids is uniquely vulnerable.

All of which is to say that among all drivers, few have more compelling reasons than I do to go light on the gas pedal on that section of Auburn.

The trooper suggested, pleasant but firm, that I seemed to be in a bit of a hurry. I allowed as how that was true.

I was humble and contrite. I threw in what I thought was a dollop of convincing sheepishness — convincing because it wasn't at all contrived.

Then, shockingly, he admonished me to be more careful and walked away.

No crisp sheet of paper exchanged hands.

Lacking any documentation of the event I can't say exactly when it happened. But it's been at least a couple months.

Yet the episode still seems to me fresh.

And more important, its main effect persists. Whenever I pull onto Auburn, but especially so when I'm driving to work after lunch, I watch my speedometer more intently than usual. When the white needle nears the line halfway between those denoting 20 and 30, my foot eases off the accelerator.

I'm glad the trooper didn't give me a ticket, of course.

But I'm even more grateful that he stopped me, and obliterated my complacency more effectively than anything short of an actual collision could have done.

In this case, at least, a warning worked.

■ Jayson Jacoby is editor 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](https://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: 1239 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. Medford office: 14 N. Central Avenue Suite 112, Medford, OR 97850; Phone: 541-776-4646; fax: 541-779-0204; Ontario office: 2430 S.W. Fourth Ave., No. 2, Ontario, OR 97914; Phone: 541-709-2040. [bentz.house.gov](mailto:bentz.house.gov).

**Oregon Gov. Kate Brown:** 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; [www.governor.oregon.gov](http://www.governor.oregon.gov).

**Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read:** [oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us](mailto: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](http://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](mailto:Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov)