

# Standing up to public records bullies

This was supposed to be an age of transparency. The nexus of education, democracy and technology should be creating an environment in which public information is widely available to everyone.

But the world seems to be getting more opaque. As conspiracy theory websites grow in popularity and are given increasing credence despite an absence of fact, traditional media is increasingly denied access to the hard data that reliable reports are based on. And sensing the upper hand, government has become more aggressive about shutting down public record releases and whistle blowers.

A perfect example of this obstructionist behavior by a government agency came up in Eastern Oregon last week.

The *Malheur Enterprise*, a weekly newspaper in Vale, published a detailed report about a con man who avoided prison time by feigning insanity. The Oregon Psychiatric Security Review Board discharged Anthony Montwheeler last year, and less than a month later he was accused of kidnapping and killing his ex-wife, fleeing police and crashing into a married couple on their way to work, killing the husband.

It's the kind of reporting that brings real insight to the way the criminal justice system operates. It's an incredible tale, but one supported by facts and evidence, research and the reputation of

those sourced by journalists.

What would have made the report even more complete is documentation detailing Montwheeler's mental evaluations — documents that were used as evidence at hearings of the Security Review Board. When the board refused to release the records to the *Enterprise*, the paper appealed the decision to the Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum, who ruled the documents should be turned over.

Instead of complying, the Security Review Board sued the small paper to keep the records secret. Not until Gov. Kate Brown pressured the board to drop the lawsuit and release the information Tuesday did the board finally agree to do so.

These records are critical, and they needed to be made public. They will show what state officials knew — and didn't know — as they ruled Montwheeler should be released. They will put hard facts in the hands of citizens and hold those in power accountable.

But this is about more than Anthony Montwheeler, the *Malheur Enterprise* and the Security Review Board. This is about beating back the brazen attempts of government agencies to obscure the truth. The balance is tipping in their favor already, and if those officials are allowed to shut out and intimidate by reaching into the deep pockets of taxpayers, we can all expect less access and truth in the future.



## GUEST COMMENT

# 'Believe survivors; change the culture'

By Mara Houck

To the Blue Mountain Eagle

Once again, April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. This year, the national campaign is focused on changing the culture to believe and support survivors of sexual assault.

Sexual violence happens to people of all ages, races, genders, sexual orientations, religions, professions, income brackets and ethnicities. Sexual violence does not need to be forcible rape. Any time someone is manipulated into participating in sexual activity by the use of guilt, fear, financial support, threats or drugs or alcohol, that is sexual violence. Someone in this country is sexually assaulted every 98 seconds.

Sexual assault is never the victim's fault; it does not matter how the victim was dressed, who the victim was with or what the victim was doing. All people should have the freedom to live life as they choose without being assaulted. Victim-blaming undermines the strength of a community, helping to create a climate in which sexual violence is tolerated and not taken seriously. Together, we can make sure our community is one where survivors of sexual assault feel believed and respected when they tell

their stories, and where the accountability is focused on attackers, not victims.

Sexual violence is a widespread public health, human rights and social justice issue that affects everyone, whether they have been a victim of sexual violence or not. All members of a community live healthier, safer, more prosperous lives when sexual assault is reduced. Normalizing sexual assault and blaming victims creates a distrustful environment of fear and anger in our workplaces, schools, families and social circles. Almost two-thirds of sexual assaults in this country are never reported. When sexual assault survivors feel respected, believed and supported, they are more likely to report the crime and to participate in prosecution.

All members of a community can help prevent sexual violence and support survivors. To do your part, speak up when you hear harmful, victim-blaming comments. Speak up when you hear jokes or insults that minimize the seriousness of sexual assault. If you hear a sexual violence survivor share their story, let them know you believe and support them, and thank them for sharing their experience with you.

Employers, maintain a respect-

ful workplace where inappropriate humor and harassment are not tolerated and all employees feel safe and valued. Coaches, teach your athletes to show respect for everyone, even when they aren't present, and that rape jokes are never funny. Parents of young ones, teach your children about consent, and to respect their bodies and the bodies of others. Parents of tweens and teens, teach your sons and daughters healthy attitudes about sexuality and development and maintain an open line of communication, even when it's hard. Community and church leaders, teach and model healthy relationships with children and adults, educate about supportive relationships and healthy masculinity and support survivors if they come to you for help or guidance.

Together, we can change the prevailing culture in this country that normalizes and minimizes serious crimes, and makes it far too difficult for survivors to speak out against their attackers. As this year's slogan says, "Believe survivors; change the culture." Together, we can build a culture where everyone feels safe, respected and believed.

Learn more about what you can do to prevent sexual assault at [ns-vc.org/saam](http://ns-vc.org/saam).

Mara Houck is the deputy district attorney for Grant County.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### As transparent as possible

To the Editor:

As transparent as possible — a phrase that makes me scratch my head, especially coming from a lawyer.

I recently requested all the financial documents from the Blue Mountains Forest Partners, in hopes of garnering a greater understanding of the organization and how they work. The first response was from the executive director, former Grant County judge Mark Webb, stating, "our financial statements are not public documents," which seemed odd to me, being as the group is organized as a 501(c)(3) organization under a public foundation filing. His lawyer is stating differently now.

This is not to mention they are "supported" by the Grant County Court, take funds from the Oregon Department of Forestry (\$123,000) and have their books organized by a public body.

The other item that makes me scratch my head is the articles of incorporation clearly state no member of the organization may profit from the organization, directly or

indirectly. They fail that standard as two members sit on the "board," and both directly benefit financially from the recommendations given to the Malheur National Forest.

The organization is also very clearly barred from lobbying governmental business, but Mr. Webb works during normal business hours to disallow public process in elections, namely the Grant County Public Forest Commission, and to undo the Grant County roads ordinance. Now Mr. Webb will stand and tell you eye to eye, "I'm on my own time." It's hard to believe a man that makes well over \$20,000 more than the gross per capita income of the average Grant County resident can just come and go from their job as they please, and still make that kind of money.

Transparency is a funny thing. If you give it, it generally opens the doors to answers and resolution. However, when you claim a desire for transparency, but hide behind your lawyer when asked for information, it generally breeds mistrust and more questions.

Closing roads must be important business to run everyone through this shell game that's called collaboration. My new question is: Is

this really what "collaboration" was meant to be?

John D. George  
Bates

### 'Monumental' library repairs look great

To the Editor:

The Grant County Library is just finishing a huge project. After a leaking roof damaged parts of the building this winter, most of the flooring needed to be replaced. That meant every item in the collection needed to be moved at least twice. To make this undertaking happen, the staff had to calculate which areas to empty out, where to temporarily place the items moved, when and how volunteers could be used to help and how to keep serving patrons during the construction. It was a monumental task, but they did it. The staff and all the volunteers did an excellent job. The new flooring looks great. And, the library is back to full function again.

Tracie Unterwegner  
John Day

Letters policy: Letters to the Editor is a forum for Blue Mountain Eagle readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters will be asked to be contained to 350 words. No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. No thank-you letters. Submissions to this page become property of the Eagle. The Eagle reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content. Letters must be original and signed by the writer. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. We must limit all contributors to one letter per person per month. Deadline is 5 p.m. Friday. Send letters to [editor@bmeagle.com](mailto:editor@bmeagle.com), or Blue Mountain Eagle, 195 N. Canyon Blvd., John Day, OR 97845; or fax to 541-575-1244.

## WHERE TO WRITE

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- **Oregon Legislature** — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180. Website: [www.leg.state.or.us](http://www.leg.state.or.us) (includes Oregon Constitution and Oregon Revised Statutes).
- **State Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario** (District: 60), Room H-475, State Capitol, 900 Court St. N.E., Salem OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1460. Email: [rep.cliffbentz@state.or.us](mailto:rep.cliffbentz@state.or.us). Website: [www.leg.state.or.us/bentz/home.htm](http://www.leg.state.or.us/bentz/home.htm).
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- **Oregon Legislative Information** — (For updates on bills, services, capitol or messages for legislators) — 800-332-2313.

### WASHINGTON, D.C.

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