

Oregon needs sunshine committee

As a disappointing legislative session comes to a close, you can lament a lot of missed opportunities: Tax reform didn't get done. PERS reform never got off the ground. The education budget survived disastrous cuts but didn't take the necessary steps forward. A transportation package is possible, but the process could still be derailed.

The Democrats have control of everything — Senate, House and governorship — but have not accomplished much of substance, which is disappointing.

You can harp on the big things, but sometimes it's the small ones that illuminate the larger missteps.

But one little bill has, like the grand bargains, also not made it across the finish line. It's a simple one, but one we believe has a bipartisan ability to make Oregon government better and help make Oregonians better informed.

It is House Bill 2101-A, colloquially known as the public records law, which is geared around informing Oregonians about their government and the world around them.

It provides extra analysis and notice of bills that affect government transparency.

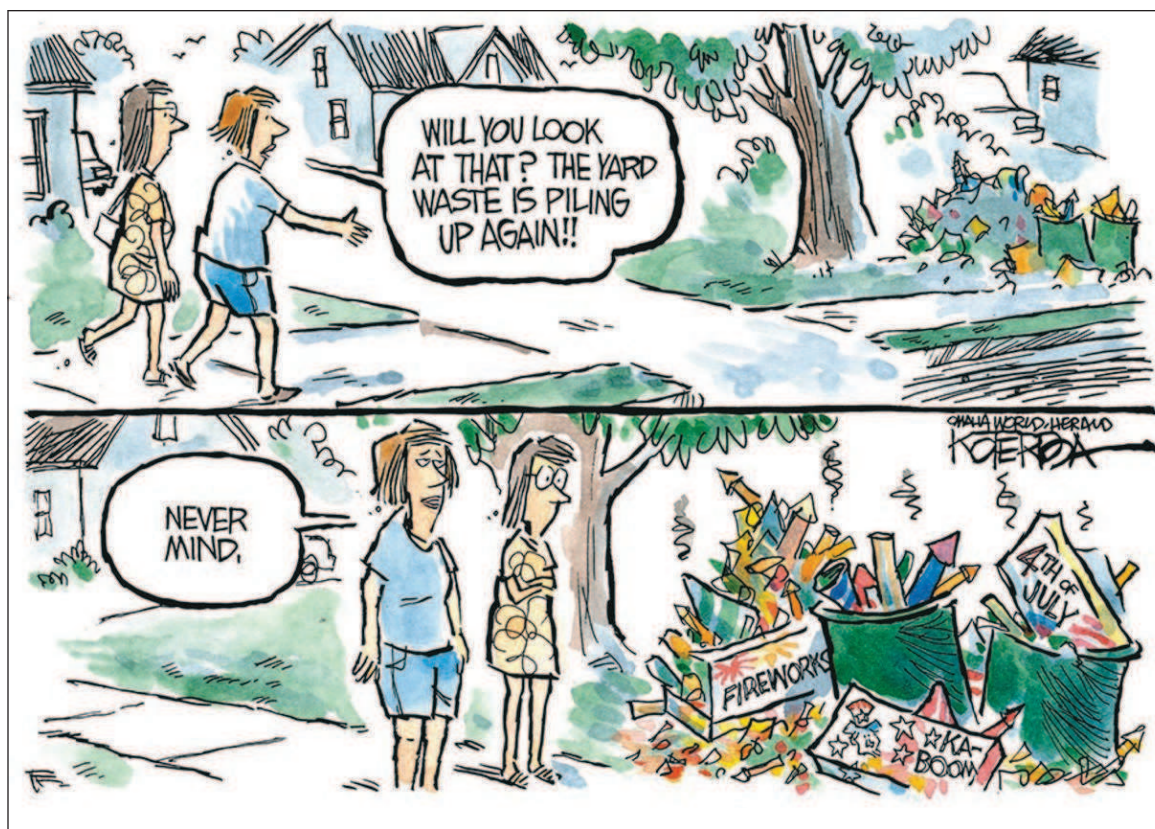
HB 2101-A would not only give the public specific notice of bills that would increase government secrecy, it would set up a balanced, nonpartisan committee to update and simplify Oregon's confusing thicket of more than 550 existing records-law exemptions.

We think that improves the lives of every Oregonian. Yet the first major reforms to public records law in the state since 1973 have not yet passed, while the aforementioned exceptions allowing greater secrecy are commonplace.

"Journalists often — and rightly — complain about a lack of openness in government," Oregon SPJ Sunshine Chair Shasta Kearns Moore said. "Now is our chance to push the needle in a better direction."

The bill would cost the state about \$200,000 a year, but the spending would boost trust in government and prevent what could be costly unintended consequences from future legislation by ensuring increased debate around a law that is the cornerstone of our democracy.

We hope the Legislature, and the majority party, will see this bill through to provide a substantive win for all Oregonians.



GUEST COMMENT

Finish Yucca Mountain

By Greg Walden
U.S. Representative, R-OR

Nuclear energy has played an integral role in generating electricity in the United States for decades. This reliable energy source is responsible for generating 20 percent of electricity across the country, providing low-cost power for consumers throughout the United States. In 2016, 30 states operated nuclear reactors for electricity and six of those states relied on nuclear power for the majority of their electricity generation.

Importantly, nuclear energy produces zero greenhouse gas emissions. According to the Nuclear Energy Institute, 553 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions were avoided by the nuclear industry throughout the United States — making it one of the cleanest forms of energy in the country.

Nuclear energy is a clean and efficient part of our nation's overall energy mix and it supports our national defense priorities. However, the federal government has dropped the ball when it comes to disposing of the necessary byproduct of nuclear activities — spent nuclear fuel from commercially generated nuclear power and high-level waste from our nation's defense activities. As a result, spent nuclear fuel currently sits idle in 121 communities and 39 states across the country, creating significant potential environmental concerns.

The Hanford Site, located about 40 miles north of my district on the Columbia River in Washington state, produced plutonium for nuclear weapons for over 40 years for America's defense program. Since the creation of the Manhattan Project, the Federal government has been responsible for cleaning up high-level radioactive waste from sites across the country like Hanford that are storing the waste from our nation's



Greg Walden

nuclear weapons development and the spent fuel generated from our Navy's nuclear submarine and aircraft carrier propulsion systems.

The Hanford site was deactivated in 1987 and in 1989

the Department of Energy's mission to clean up the waste began. Twenty-eight years later, 2,300 tons of spent nuclear fuel remains at the site in dry storage and millions of gallons of high-level waste awaits disposal. The recent cave-in at Hanford is just the latest cause for concern. While nobody was injured and there has been no evidence of contamination, it doesn't take away the fact that this material clearly needs to be moved to a permanent disposal facility.

The waste currently sitting at the Hanford site is engineered by design to be sent to the Yucca Mountain permanent geological repository facility in the Nevada desert. Yucca Mountain was chosen by Congress in 1987 to house both spent nuclear fuel and the kind of high-level waste found at Hanford. At Yucca Mountain, these materials would be safely isolated 1,000 feet underground. In fact, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission determined that the site could safely store this nuclear material for one million years.

Oregon ratepayers, through a fee tied to the electricity generated from nuclear energy, have already paid the Department of Energy over \$160 million to finance the costs associated with the development of a permanent repository to dispose of spent nuclear fuel. Washingtonians have paid an additional \$872 million in this effort. All told, taxpayers around the country have paid more than \$40 billion to permanently dispose of spent nuclear fuel and the high-level nuclear waste

like that found at Hanford.

Despite the safety and environmental benefits and billions of dollars taxpayers and ratepayers across the country have already invested, the Obama administration halted Yucca Mountain from moving forward and tried to permanently prevent the project from being completed.

As chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee, I've directed our team to address these problems. We've done our homework too. Dating back to 2011, the committee has conducted rigorous oversight, held several hearings examining all aspects of nuclear waste policy and some of our members even traveled to Yucca Mountain for a first-hand look at the geologic repository. Now it's time to act.

Our resulting legislation, the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act of 2017, recognizes that Yucca Mountain is the most expeditious pathway for communities around the country that store defense high-level waste — like the Hanford Site — to dispose of that waste. The bill reinstates Yucca Mountain as the cornerstone of our nuclear waste disposal while also allowing private interim storage projects to move forward for the first time — a concept that would temporarily hold commercial nuclear waste until Yucca Mountain is ready to receive shipments.

The recent incident at Hanford could have been a lot worse. It's time for the Department of Energy to fulfill their legal obligation to dispose of this waste to assure nothing worse happens. Thankfully, we're working towards a durable solution at the Energy and Commerce Committee and rest assured, we will get this waste consolidated and safely stored in its permanent home in Yucca Mountain.

Rep. Greg Walden (R-Hood River) is the chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

FARMER'S FATE

Gender-neutral road trips

By Brianna Walker
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

The ABC's of a long road trip are Absolute Bladder Control. There are varying degrees of course, and while helpful, it is rare that the driver and the passenger are at the same level. Such was the case on a recent family road trip to southern California. At the point when crossing my legs no longer was helping — and the nearest rest area still more than 20 miles away — I opted for a fast food restaurant right off the freeway. It was nearly lunchtime anyway. We may as well kill two birds.

I couldn't get the kids out of the car seats quick enough, and as my husband headed towards the ordering queue, I waddled my way to the restroom. There was a sign taped to the door of the woman's bathroom. In big, bold, red letters, it read: "Always lock stall doors." Odd. I glanced at the men's bathroom door, but there was no sign there. Weird to be sure, but my bladder, feeling like an over-inflated beach ball, didn't care. I started to push open the door, when it was opened from inside.

I stepped out of the way to let a 50-something man out of the ladies room. Startled didn't even begin to describe my reaction. I double checked that I was indeed in line for the correct bathroom, and



Brianna Walker

yes, it said ladies. I saw four stalls inside, before the door closed shut, and I turned away — back into the nearly empty restaurant.

"Was it occupied?" my husband asked upon my swift return. "You could say that," I said, suddenly feeling no need at all to use the facilities. The next 20 miles to the rest area somehow passed in much less discomfort than the previous 10 had.

Equality is a wonderful thing — in the right places. But what is wrong with embracing the differences between the genders as a positive thing? Recently a mom I know actually took the time to write a letter of complaint to a scrapbooking company because in a large assortment of paper they included a sheet that had dinosaurs on it with the words "Boys Rule." She was angry, because maybe her daughter liked dinosaurs and said it was sexist to include words like that. No mention was made of the princess paper with the words "Girls Rule" on it. When did we become a nation of complainers that can't seem to find beauty in two very separate genders? Equal pay for equal work is a good thing, but what is wrong with embracing the idea of different characteris-

tics (and bathrooms) for a gentleman and a lady?

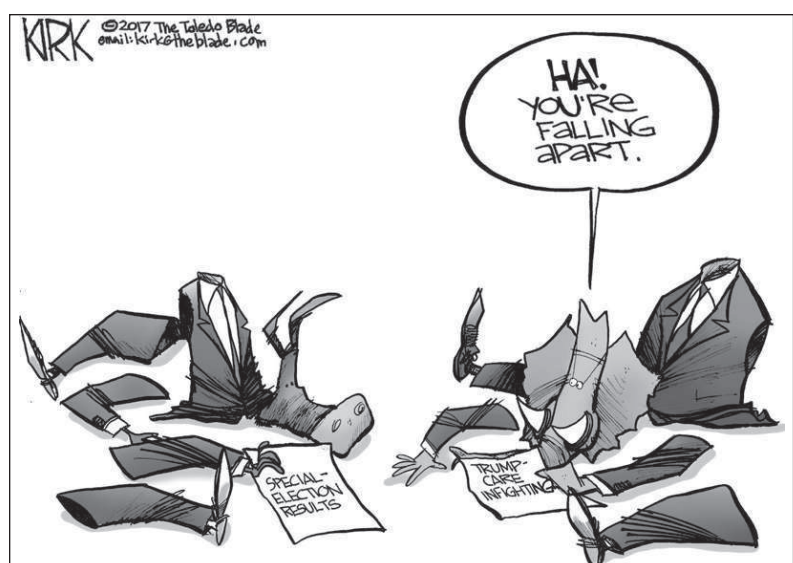
Perhaps I am old-fashioned, but I cannot understand why a man opening the door or pulling out a chair for a woman is now sexist and a 50 year old man in a ladies room is forward thinking. If it is an outhouse, then we all take turns and it becomes gender neutral — and I have no problem with that. If there is only enough room in a business for one bathroom, put a male/female sign on the one bathroom door — with a deadbolt — and I am good with that too. But a restroom with stalls, and a fluid gender? Bladder control becomes even more absolute!

"I'd rather head out behind a tree," I told my husband as we got back in the pickup.

"Well perhaps you should identify as a dog, and then you can pee behind or on any tree you want!" he laughed.

I just shuddered. Women's bathrooms that aren't for women. "One nation under God" that doesn't believe in God anymore. We certainly aren't in Mayberry anymore. I once read that the eye only sees what the mind is prepared to comprehend. If that is true, my seeing dog and I will both be using the tree out back soon.

Brianna Walker occasionally writes about the Farmer's Fate for the Blue Mountain Eagle.



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