

Harassment much too common in halls of power

The allegations of sexual harassment in the Oregon Capitol are disturbing, though not surprising.

Sexual harassment occurs in too many workplaces, and capitols seem a prime breeding ground because of the inherent power imbalance. Victims of sexual harassment — whether lawmakers, lobbyists or legislative employees — often are reluctant to speak out for fear of losing their political influence or their jobs.

It took courage for two female state senators — Sara Gelsler, D-Corvallis, and another unnamed senator — to report what they considered sexual harassment by a colleague, Sen. Jeff Kruse, R-Roseburg.

Kruse has denied the allegations, which are under investigation by legislative officials. What we do know, from a letter by Senate President Peter Courtney stripping Kruse of his committee assignments, is that legislative officials in 2016 instructed Kruse “not to touch women at work. Period.”

Some Oregonians may argue that sexual harassment is an example of political correctness run amok. Or that changing generational standards make it difficult for people, men especially, to know how to act. Not so. Harassment or intimidation in the workplace is never OK.

For anyone who is uncertain about what to do, here are tips: If you’re unsure whether

a remark will be heard as sexist, demeaning or harassing, don’t speak it. If you wonder whether a hug is appropriate, ask the person. If you want to compliment someone’s shirt, do so nicely — without praising the person’s body or letting your eyes linger.

Sexual harassment is never acceptable, never understandable, never tolerable, and certainly not at the Oregon Capitol. Of all people, lawmakers have a responsibility to know and heed the rules and laws they create.

The Oregon Legislature’s personnel rules clearly state that sexual harassment can constitute “unwelcome conduct in the form of a sexual advance, sexual comment, request for sexual favors, unwanted or offensive touching or physical contact of a sexual nature, unwanted closeness, impeding or blocking movement, sexual gesture, sexual innuendo, sexual joke, sexually charged language, intimate inquiry, persistent unwanted courting, sexist insult, gender stereotype, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature ...”

Before each legislative session, every legislator and every legislative employee — hundreds of people — must attend mandatory training on maintaining a harassment-free workplace and other policies. No one is exempt from that training.

Yet sexual harassment still occurs. And it’s still inexcusable.



GUEST COMMENT

Rural America needs high-speed internet

By Ron Wyden
U.S. Senate, D-OR



U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden

Every year, I hold town halls in each of our state’s 36 counties to hear directly from Oregonians on the key issues facing rural and urban communities. During these meetings, and traveling between them, I have heard and seen firsthand the importance of getting affordable broadband internet access, high-speed wireless broadband and strong, consistent cell service throughout Oregon.

This past August, Donald Trump’s Federal Communications Commission Chairman Ajit Pai proposed to lower the standard speed of internet access in rural America. This is just wrong. The Congress mandated the FCC work to expand access to high-speed internet to every American. Pai believes slower internet speeds are good enough for rural areas. I completely disagree.

In my 850-plus town meetings, Oregonians have told me how frustrated they are by slow internet access. Rural residents make it clear that lack of high-speed internet isn’t a trivial matter. High-speed internet access and cell coverage are critical for everything from reaching 911 and accessing health care to selling made-in-Oregon products around the world.

But private sector investment has failed to bring wireless service to large parts of rural America. When power companies didn’t reach rural communities in the 1930s, Congress passed the Rural Electrification Act and transformed rural lives. Now Congress, the U.S. Department of

Agriculture and the FCC have a responsibility to offer more consistent internet and voice infrastructure for rural Americans who Big Cable won’t serve.

Closing the digital divide is urgent business for five reasons.

First, there should never be an accident victim who cannot reach 911 because there’s no cell signal. Limited cell coverage leads to preventable tragedies.

Second, small-town Oregon business owners shouldn’t be at a disadvantage in reaching customers beyond their city limits. Entrepreneurs need 24-7 access to their Facebook page or website to connect to the global economy. And in the recreation economy, smartphone access is crucial to connecting visitors with local small businesses.

Third, U.S. farmers and ranchers are increasingly relying on precision agriculture technologies. High-speed wireless support is a must to keep pace with the ongoing deployment of technology in the field. Today, farmers can control water to their irrigation systems through their smartphones, allowing them to reduce costs, while also practicing responsible agriculture.

Fourth, schools depend increasingly on the internet to improve education with innovative coursework. Yet substandard internet access currently leaves many students at a great disadvantage. Students lacking 24-7 internet access at home must

depend on limited hours at local libraries, friends’ houses or community centers to do research online.

Fifth, tele-health promises to transform how rural and remote communities access health care. For example, a health care provider can now examine a patient via an in-home video consultation, and diabetes patients can remotely monitor their blood glucose levels. These options rely on reliable, fast and low-cost internet coverage.

What’s the solution?

The first step is finding out who has coverage now. I’m co-sponsoring a bill to require the FCC to create more accurate mobile service maps, especially in rural areas. That will ensure the government more accurately directs resources to the communities that need access the most.

Next, if Big Cable won’t serve rural areas, communities should have the right to build their own high-speed networks. I introduced The Community Broadband Act this year with Sen. Cory Booker to do just that. And finally, our country needs robust investment for broadband internet buildout, which I’ve called for as part of an upgrade to America’s infrastructure.

Trump’s FCC wants to tell rural Americans that they don’t need faster internet or increased internet access. I believe that Congress, the Department of Agriculture and the FCC should expand access to high-speed internet to everyone, not tell rural America its current marginal service is good enough.

Ron Wyden, a Democrat, is a U.S. senator from Oregon.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Don’t shoot the messenger

To the Editor:

Friends, and some not so friendly, have been chatting with me about my papering the Post Office bulletin boards with my opinion on the 911 issue. Well, maybe my method was a little over the top, and I apologize for that, but I hope that people will not shoot the messenger but zero in on the message: that being that 541-575-0030 is a wonderful free local substitute for 911 because it is the same local person answering the phone. Sure it’s only another \$38 charge; well, no snowflake ever wants to be accused of starting an avalanche — \$38 here, \$38 dollars there, pretty soon you can’t afford a snow cone. I’m a disabled veteran on a fixed income and seek to cut every expense I can; if the extra redundant charge doesn’t bother most of my neighbors, I’ll suck it up and pay the fee.

Richie Colbeth
John Day

Editor’s note: The phone number 541-575-0030 is the nonemergency line for the John Day dispatch center, which also receives 911 calls from Grant County. If the dispatch

center closes, it will impact both 911 and the nonemergency line; the nonemergency line will not be staffed 24/7 because the city will no longer employ the dispatchers who answer those calls.

Misinformation about 911 dispatch measure

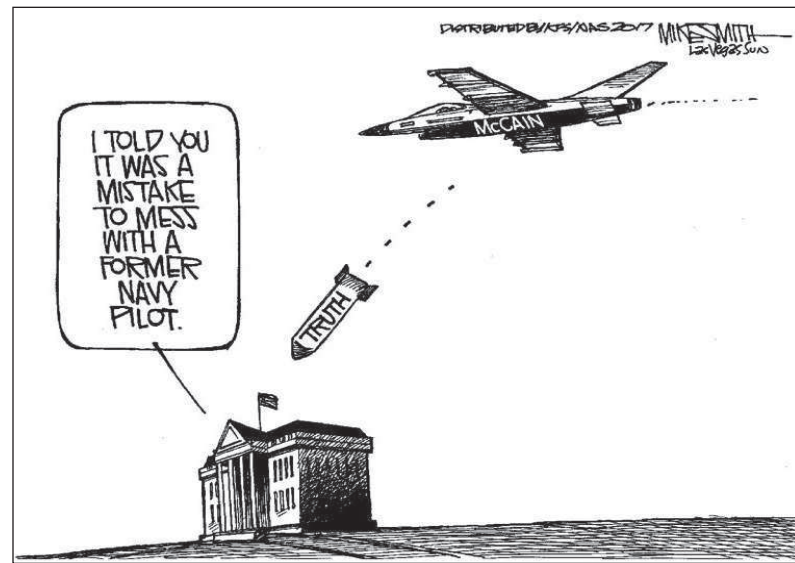
To the Editor:

Got our ballots in the post the other day. I know there is a lot of controversy over this “Keep 911 Local” issue, but I am still voting yes. I have asked a lot of questions, had a lot of folks share their opinions, which led to more questions, got answers, and although no one likes to shell out more money for taxes, I still feel this is the right thing to do. I have heard all sorts of things against keeping our dispatch center here in Grant County: how this will become a permanent tax (no it will not; it would have to be voted on as it has a sunset clause), how it can go up 3 percent without any vote (no, it can not be arbitrarily raised), how it will be cheaper outsourcing to Frontier Dispatch center in Condon (not necessarily; Frontier makes

money by having the counties they dispatch for pay dispatch fees; plus by consolidating other counties under them they are awarded the 911 telephone tax fees for each county by the state; Grant County would still have to pay Frontier, or whom ever they outsource to, for dispatching each agency John Day currently dispatches).

This whole issue for me boils down to local dispatchers who know the area and can get help dispatched on the way to those who need emergency services faster. When even the local Oregon State Police sergeant expresses his concern about Grant County’s dispatch center being outsourced, well that speaks volumes! I have had cause to call the state police office numerous times over the past few days, getting their dispatch center in Salem every time. True, it was not an emergency, but not one of the dispatchers had any idea where Monument was nor how far it was away from John Day. So to me, despite the added cost on my tax bill for the short term, I would like to keep our 911 dispatch center local. If you have questions like I did, do call and ask!

Rose and Darrell Howe
Monument



WHERE TO WRITE

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- **Grant County Courthouse** — 201 S. Humbolt St., Suite 280, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-575-0059. Fax: 541-575-2248.
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- **John Day** — 450 E. Main St, John Day, 97845. Phone: 541-575-0028. Fax: 541-575-1721. Email: cityjd@centurytel.net.
- **Long Creek** — P.O. Box 489, Long Creek 97856. Phone: 541-421-3601. Fax: 541-421-3075. Email: info@cityoflongcreek.com.
- **Monument** — P.O. Box 426, Monument 97864. Phone and fax: 541-934-2025. Email: cityofmonument@centurytel.net.
- **Mt. Vernon** — P.O. Box 647, Mt. Vernon 97865. Phone: 541-932-4688. Fax: 541-932-4222. Email: cmtv@ortelco.net.
- **Prairie City** — P.O. Box 370, Prairie City 97869. Phone: 541-820-3605. Fax: 820-3566. Email: pchall@ortelco.net.
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- **Oregon Legislature** — State Capitol,

Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180. Website: 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. Website: www.leg.state.or.us/bentz/home.htm.

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- **The White House**, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20500; Phone-comments: 202-456-1111; Switchboard: 202-456-1414.

- **U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D** — 516 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. Phone: 202-224-5244. Email: wayne.kinney@wyden.senate.gov Website: http://wyden.senate.gov Fax: 202-228-2717.

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