

Open meetings critical for self-governance

A government of the people, by the people and for the people is only possible when the people are aware of what the government is doing.

When we declared our independence and fought to be free from the rule of a tyrant, we made the bold assertion that we, the people, could govern ourselves.

With the power of the nation spread among the people, instead of hoarded upon a throne, we actualized the fact we were all created equal.

But with this shared responsibility for the governance of our nation, we created a new necessity: If we are to effectively govern ourselves, we must be educated and informed about government actions.

To elect the best people to represent us in this republic, we ought to know where they stand on the issues affecting our communities.

To this end, laws prevent government officials from doing most business — the public's business — in private. And the freedom of the press is enshrined not only in the First Amendment to our Constitution but also in state laws.

Oregon law is very clear that decisions of governing bodies must be arrived at openly: "The Oregon form of government requires an informed public aware of the deliberations and decisions of governing bodies and the information upon which such decisions were made."

Governing bodies must hold open public meetings. They must provide advanced public notice, including a list of subjects anticipated to be considered. They must keep and make available to the public minutes of the meetings, including all proposals, votes, the substance of any discussion on any matter and a reference to any document discussed.

Because governing bodies must also deal with sensitive matters that should not be disclosed publicly — personnel complaints, pending litigation, real property transactions and other items legitimately exempt from public disclosure — Oregon law provides a very narrow list of exceptions to the open

meetings law that may be discussed privately in executive session. Journalists may attend but cannot report on matters discussed that actually fall under one of the exceptions.

Even when allowed, executive sessions require proper notice, citing the specific statutory exemption to the open meetings laws, and no final decisions may be made in private.

These laws are intended to provide the people with the information necessary to govern themselves and to hold accountable the people they have elected to represent them.

When people feel these laws may have been violated, they can file a complaint for the state ethics commission to investigate, as a resident did in November against Prairie City officials as reported in this newspaper. An investigator told the officials it did not appear that anyone intentionally violated executive session law, but the ethics commission voted to investigate the matter after a preliminary review.

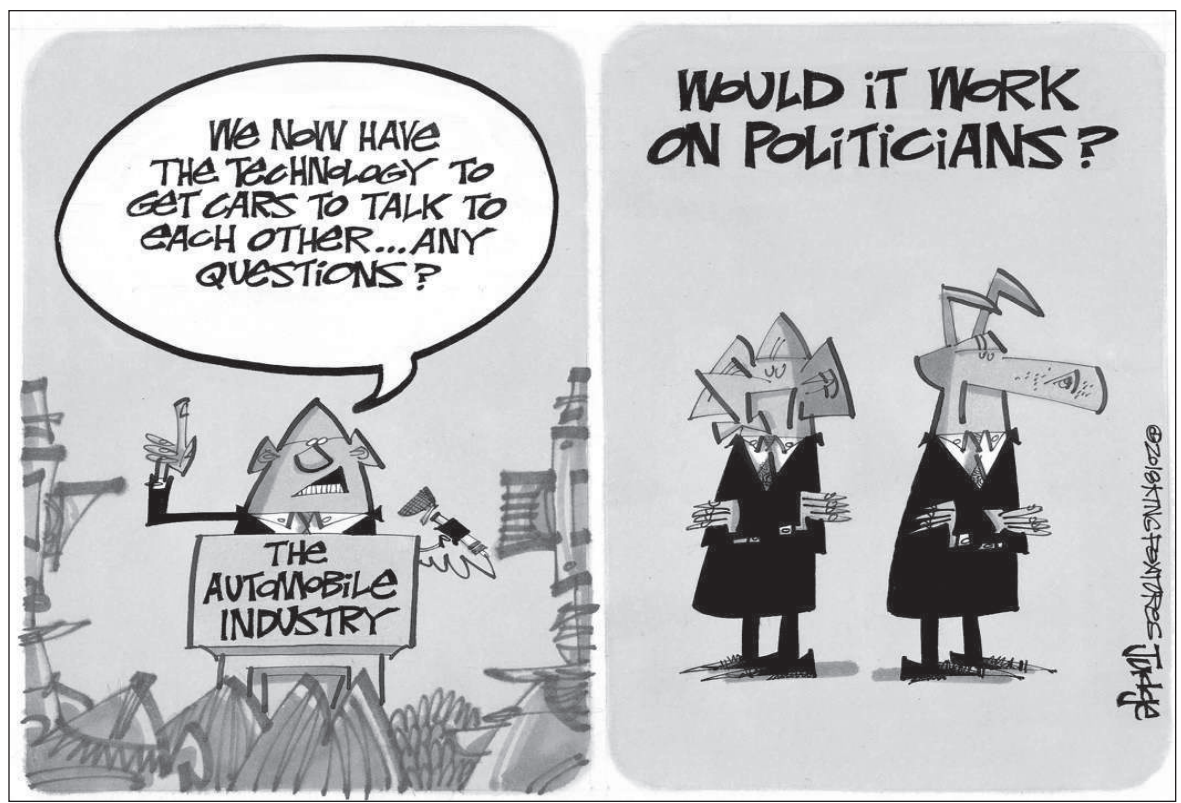
The conclusion of the investigation is not yet available and likely will not result in large fines, but the action should serve as a reminder to every governing body in Grant County that open meetings laws require just that: open meetings.

Other local entities have undoubtedly violated open meetings laws. The Eagle has sat in on executive sessions where the conversation has veered from properly restricted topics to matters that should have been discussed only in open session. We did not believe the subject matter rose to the level of a formal complaint, but we do believe it is important to stress to local officials that they must adhere to these laws.

Even as volunteers, which most local officials are, they must be committed to the importance of open meetings. Our system of government depends on it.

We encourage all local officials to study and follow Oregon's open meetings laws — for the sake of an informed electorate.

If we, the people, are not informed, our system of self-governance will fail.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Clearing the record on Hamsher

To the Editor:

I'm responding to a letter in last week's publication of the BME titled, "Do not vote for Jim Hamsher." While I believe that every person is entitled to their opinion, I also believe they have a duty to present accurate information along with it. The information presented in the mentioned letter was grossly inaccurate.

Iron Triangle made an offer for the property in Prairie City for \$50,000. It was appraised for \$100,000. Jim Hamsher suggested a counter-offer of \$100,000 (its appraised value), but his recommendation was ignored by the city council, who insisted on making an offer for \$150,000. So it wasn't the case that Jim "led" the council in making a counter-offer for \$150,000 (as was stated in the mentioned letter). Again, Jim's suggestion was ignored.

On the topic of broadband internet, the reason that Prairie City chose not to be included in the agreement the county recently approved is because it has the best internet in the county. Prairie City doesn't have the problems with the internet experienced in other parts of the county. So it didn't see the point in fixing what wasn't broken.

Jim is well aware of the need for improved internet in Grant County. His reluctance to approve the broadband agreement recently established by the Grant County Court was in regard to a large number of unknown details, concerning cost and logistics. The current agreement obligates the county to unknown expenses to the tune of millions of dollars. It also fails to answer questions like, how will the service be distributed to the residences spread out across the county?

Again, Jim only wanted to see more definite details in the agreement before obligating the county to it. He believed the county court should have taken a little more time, and determined answers to many of these questions, before approving the agreement.

As to the other references to Jim in the mentioned letter, I advise you to take them with a grain of salt. The author of this letter clearly didn't do her homework before voicing her opinion.

Sandy Rue
Prairie City

'Do your due diligence, and cast your votes'

To the Editor:

The ballots have been mailed, and now it's time for each of us to do our civic duty and vote. Before you fill in the ovals, please do your other civic duty and research for yourself the capabilities and the honesty of each candidate you intend to vote for. As a society, we have reached a new low in our country, our state, our county and our communities when it comes to moral values. This low has not served us well. We have more people on drugs, more people out of work and more people running to serve in various offices who have less than desired moral values, and many believe that they are above the laws that govern us all.

I sincerely hope that you will take the time to learn the facts of each candidate you vote for. Will this person listen to the people they represent? Will this person put their own agenda aside and do what's best for those they represent? Does this person carry the moral values needed to help bring dignity back to the office they will hold? What will this person do to make their community, county, state or country better?

In today's world, our political representatives have developed the "good ole boy" mentality, and so many of us have jumped on that bandwagon. That bandwagon has kept new thoughts, different thoughts and better thoughts from becoming reality.

You rub my back I'll rub yours, and it only helps those who have the money to enlist. I think it's time we elect some new faces that will put the dignity back into holding a political office and do away with the "good ole boy" mentality. Let's vote to restore the moral values that helped our community, state and country become great places to live. Let's vote to put people back to work and not depend on our government to pay the bills.

Do your due diligence, and cast your votes in a way to help everyone.

Rusty Clark
Monument

Hamsher 'the right person for county judge'

To the Editor:

I'd like to share a few things I have helped Jim Hamsher with in the past. I didn't even live in the county when I first had contact with Jim during the devastating fire when many folks lost their homes and pastures in Grant County.

I can tell you firsthand that it has been a great pleasure to work with Jim on getting donations for folks who were victims of the fire. This man worked many hours for the folks of Grant County. He, myself and another person worked countless hours on getting donations of hay for folks whose pastures and hay storage were lost during this devastating time for Grant County.

I have helped Jim several different times going to folks' homes getting hay donations and also meeting him down at Grant Western to help unload hay donations and help load it as well. This man has put his best foot forward for the community on so many different levels.

I can promise you now that he has every intention to work with other city and state governments and make Grant County the best county in Eastern Oregon. We have distributed hay throughout many winters since the fire and still are doing it, so I also know that he has every intention to bring jobs back to Grant County and put more people back to work. And within the community, this man loves his community and sees things that can be changed, and he is working on getting things changed.

This is not an easy task to do. He has done a wonderful job representing the folks of Grant County. I am not gonna sit here and bash people, but where were some of you folks when it came time to bring donations in. Many of you did and many of you didn't, but I can promise you this man is the right person for county judge.

Tyrel Cooper
Prineville

Myers 'works hard for Grant County'

To the Editor:

As a longtime Prairie City resident since 1967, I have seen the leadership of many Grant County judges. In my opinion, Scott Myers has done a great job for the people of Grant County for many reasons. He understands public meeting laws and conducts county court business with professionalism and transparency.

He pushed hard to hire six additional Road Department employees and to re-open the Long Creek

Shop. He fought hard to keep the historical dam at Bates State Park. Through his efforts, there is now an elevator in the courthouse for easier accessibility to the court. Recently, he supported broadband, which will increase internet speeds for many county residents, and also supported keeping 911 local, which will keep jobs in our county. Most importantly, in my mind, he either chairs or serves on dozens of commissions, boards and committees that help to bring millions of dollars to Grant County, including support for mental and public health.

Judge a man by his actions is a good code to live by. I am supporting Scott Myers for judge because his actions as a commissioner and a judge have shown that he works hard for Grant County.

Jean Kline
Prairie City

Osburn 'reliable, diligent, conscientious'

To the Editor:

"Reliable, diligent, conscientious" are words we use to describe Archie Osburn. Although a newcomer to the Grant County political arena, Archie has the experience, giving him the essential, crucial skills needed of a county commissioner.

Archie is personable, friendly. His friends are from diversified interests, businesses and ventures from several western states. Many of whom he has developed working relationships with include elected officials from all over Eastern Oregon.

As a young man in the 1970s, Archie quickly learned negotiation skills, successfully saving the family ranch from default. He has persevered as a cattleman, having BLM leases in both Grant and Wheeler counties.

Those leases require him to communicate constructively with BLM range managers to negotiate and abide by lease parameters. He owns a fire suppression business.

This business requires him to communicate with intellect and astuteness with the USFS and ODF, adhering to regulations and contracts.

He skillfully manages each of these businesses, being informed and knowledgeable of all applicable statutory changes, including DMV and ODOT, along with regulatory and rule changes for his leases and fire suppression requirements and contracts.

He understands budgeting. Over the years, he has served on the budget advisory committee for ODF. He has worked with managers for Ochoco Lumber Co., DR Johnson Lumber Co., Crown Pacific. Local ranchers Archie has worked with on this committee include the late JC Oliver and Sharon Livingston.

The past 30 years, Archie has served on the Grant County FSA (Farm Service Agency), providing funding through a loan program helping landowners with everything from conservation, to commodities loss, to emergency disaster.

Archie understands the commitment of being a county commissioner. He realizes issues are different for the diversity of Grant County. He is dedicated to the oath of office. He will listen to and represent all citizens. He will work cooperatively and respectfully with the other court members.

We believe Archie will be an asset and a practical representative for all of Grant County. Please consider joining us when casting your ballot for Grant County commissioner.

John and Charlene Morris
John Day

See LETTERS, Page A5

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