

# Attempt to intimidate newspaper a red flag

Malheur County Sheriff Brian Wolfe effectively ended a broiling controversy last week when he announced that there would be no investigation of a local newspaper regarding alleged telephonic harassment of a local official.

The Malheur Enterprise newspaper in Vale reported county officials sought out advice from Wolfe about the possibility of opening an official inquiry of the weekly publication.

Officials assert that the newspaper crossed a line and potentially set itself up for telephonic harassment charges by making phone calls and sending emails to the county's economic development director, Greg Smith, as it reported on economic development.

The Enterprise reported the story Monday in its online edition.

The timing of the move by the county is interesting — the Enterprise had just finished an investigative story about county economic development projects — but Smith's involvement in the issue is troubling. Smith, who also represents Umatilla and Morrow counties in the Oregon Legislature, essentially complained the Malheur Enterprise was sending questions regarding a story to personal email addresses of economic development officials. Questions, it appears, Smith did not want to answer. Smith, by the way, uses

two email addresses to conduct county business. Neither one is secret or "personal." In fact, last year Smith gave out his personal cellphone number to the public and told the audience at a government meeting he was available "at any time," and they could call him directly.

So why is he complaining now about the Malheur Enterprise seeking information on a story in the public interest?

Using emails to send questions or calling public officials while working on a story is about as standard an operating procedure for newspapers as putting ink on paper.

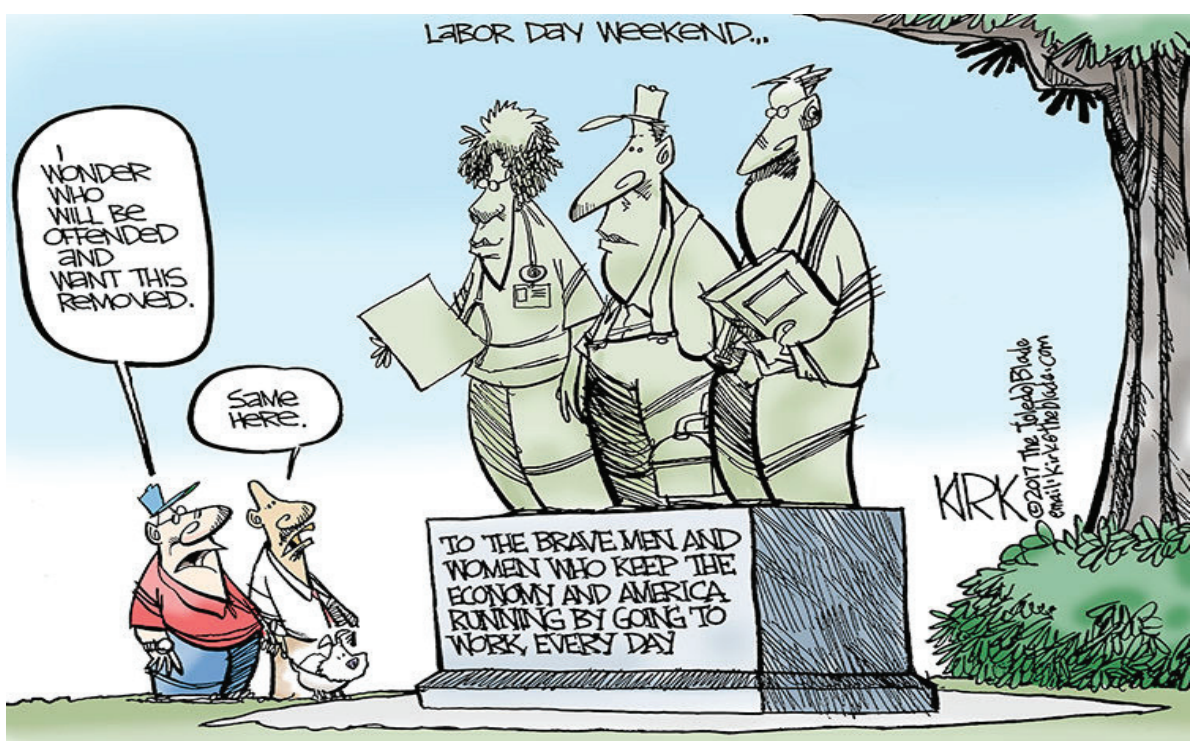
It is a routine way for reporters to secure information from elected and appointed leaders so the public can be informed. There is no "harassment" about the practice.

At first glance the saga could seem to fit into a small box of modest face-off between officials and a newspaper in a far-off place.

Except it can't be dismissed. When elected or appointed leaders try to intimidate — which seems to be the case here — a newspaper and its reporters from a story, average voters should give it their undivided attention. And they should be worried.

Thankfully, Wolfe made the right decision.

When public officials squawk about being asked questions, that should send up a red flag of warning to voters.



## Bend newspaper buy is an opportunity

When Heidi Wright called me June 3 to suggest that our company should take a look at bidding on Bend's daily newspaper, The Bulletin, I was at once startled, skeptical and intrigued.

We hired Heidi as our chief operating officer in June 2017 — away from The Bulletin, where she had been the chief financial officer of its parent company, Western Communications. At that point, we had just bid on two other newspapers out of Wescom's bankruptcy in Baker City and La Grande.

Pursuing the Bulletin prospect, the board of EO Media Group convened two impromptu meetings. For the first of these sessions, at the Sheraton Portland Airport Hotel, we invited Daily Astorian Publisher Kari Borgen, who had also worked within Western Communications. Asked what she thought of the opportunity, Kari said: "It's exciting and it's scary." That typified our deliberations, during which we probed the risks and assessed the promise.

My daughter, Susan Forrester Rana, flew up from Oakland for our second board meeting, during which we set our top bid for The Bulletin. By this time my cousin, Kathryn Brown, had made contact with a longtime family associate who is an executive of the Bank of Eastern Oregon. In addition to that bank financing, Heidi was speaking with prospective investors in Bend who were eager to have our pursuit of ownership succeed.

The auction on July 29 occurred in the office of the Portland law firm Tonkon Torp. Our group — including my cousin



Steve Forrester

Kathryn, Heidi and our CFO Rick Hansen and our lawyers — were placed in one room while the three-man team from Adams Publishing Group was in another. Rhode Island Suburban Newspapers, the party that made the initial bid on The Bulletin, did not show up for the auction. To honor our family's ambitions and the gravity of the moment, Kathryn wore a Pendleton jacket that had belonged to my mother, Eleanor.

At 10 a.m. we moved to another conference room — the bidding site. When the Adams trio entered, we stood to greet them. Mark Adams, the company's CEO, sat two seats away from me; Heidi was to my left. In a thrilling auction that would last 15 minutes, Adams would be their bidder, Heidi ours.

The bidding requirement was to raise by minimum increments of \$50,000, beginning at \$2,550,000. After the initial round of bidding drove the price to \$3,050,000, the Adams group left the room to confer privately. There was a second conference at the \$3,450,000 mark, after which Mark Adams jumped the bid to \$3.6 million. Heidi hesitated for what seemed to me 20 seconds. But Rick clocked it at 15 seconds. Even though we were below our ceiling, her hesitation seemed an eternity. Instead of raising our bid, Mark Adams graciously congratulated us on our acquisition.

In taking ownership of The Bulletin, our company is not simply buying another property. It is taking hold of a journalis-

tic opportunity that will become immensely significant to all of Oregon. With the decline of formerly influential daily newspapers such as The Register-Guard of Eugene and others, The Bulletin will become a beacon in a part of Oregon that is gaining economic, cultural and political significance. The Bulletin will become a heavy-weight partner for our Eastern Oregon newspapers in Umatilla, Union, Baker, Wallowa and Grant counties — and for our papers on the Oregon and Washington coast and the Capital Press as well.

Our newspaper group fosters a culture of collaboration. That has allowed us to punch well above our weight. In collaboration with the Pamplin Media Group, we have formed a statewide bureau that reversed the decline in coverage of the Oregon Legislature and state agencies. In 2006 our papers collaborated on a series of articles about climate change. In addition to pieces that were informed by science, each newspaper developed cameos of scientists, naturalists, farmers and fishers who spoke about what they were noticing in their region's natural environment. That series won an award of Special Merit in the national Grantham Prize competition.

The environment and climate change are the primary issues of the 21st century. Our series — 12 years old — is ripe for an update. And The Bulletin's participation in such a venture would give a new series even more impact.

Steve Forrester, the former editor and publisher of The Daily Astorian, is the president and CEO of EO Media Group. Contact him at [sforrester@eomediagroup.com](mailto:sforrester@eomediagroup.com).

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Approach coordination responsibly

To the Editor:

The Grant County Court approved Ordinance 2019-07 last week. Legally, the ordinance is unnecessary. It's also confused — for example, about the need to have a Natural Resource Committee or invoke coordination. Still, I support it because, surprisingly, it explicitly recognizes Forest Service and BLM authority to regulate and manage federal public lands within Grant County.

This has two consequences. One is that Ordinance 2019-07 renders other county laws like Measure 10, 12-38, 12-37 (UN Free!) and Ordinance 2013-01 — which challenge such Congressionally-delegated authority — null and void, legally speaking. The other is that it obligates court members to pursue their coordination responsibilities in good faith as responsible partners. The ordinance thus serves as an important corrective to the unproductive and sometimes adversarial position that has characterized county government since 2013.

36 CFR § 219.4 and Federal Register Vol. 77, No. 68 (April 9, 2012) provide the legal context for this good faith effort regarding coordination. I've asked the Eagle to post this information online and encourage

county residents to review it.

You'll find that coordination is just one among several forms of public engagement required by federal law; that county government is just one among several entities federal agencies are required to coordinate with; that federal agencies are required to coordinate their land use plans with the land use plans and policies counties are responsible for, per state law; and that consistency between federal plans and county plans is not required. Clearly, coordination itself does not confer any unique status on county governments.

It does however offer them some important opportunities. For example, locally, county government is tasked with public safety and search-and-rescue responsibilities. If the county's wildfire protection plan prioritized strategic fuel-break and WUI corridor treatments along county roads (and elsewhere) to provide escape routes and enhance public safety during wildfires, or its search-and-rescue policies addressed access needs and how roads are closed — with gates rather than berms, say — federal agencies would likely try to accommodate such objectives and considerations in their plans.

I hope court members will approach coordination responsibly and take advantage of such opportunities.

Mark Webb  
Mt. Vernon

### Truth in regionalism

To the Editor:

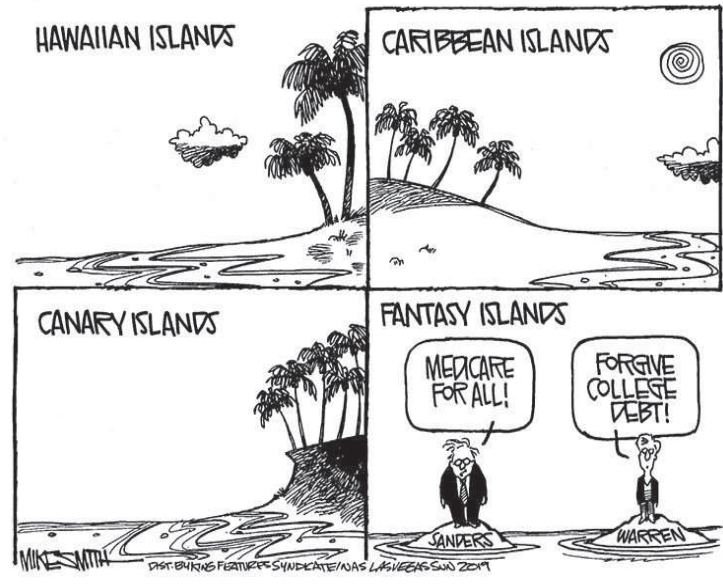
Junk cluttered on property amidst overgrowth of weeds and brush is not a treasured "regional flavor." Nor is it iconic in any sense of "western" or "cowboy." To the contrary, negligence of such sort only reinforces the crudely cartoonish characterizations of rural people general.

Historically, such characterization of rural people as "lesser than city folks" has been applied to politically neutralize public sympathy that otherwise would weigh government policies more in recognition of how vital to national economic health and character are the occupations of — and lifestyle — of rural people.

Junk and clutter are not heroic bulwarks against "uppity influence." It is instead passive aggression against the community. Behavior-wise, as adolescent as that of a rebellious teenager refusing to clean up his or her room.

Worse, though, it reinforces all the discrediting characterizations that have politically victimized rural people since the late 19th century — which then they mobilized to fight by forming the Grange System.

Storie Mooser  
Prairie City



## WHERE TO WRITE

### GRANT COUNTY

- **Grant County Courthouse** — 201 S. Humbolt St., Suite 280, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-575-0059. Fax: 541-575-2248.
- **Canyon City** — P.O. Box 276, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-575-0509. Fax: 541-575-0515. Email: [tocc1862@centurylink.net](mailto:tocc1862@centurylink.net).
- **Dayville** — P.O. Box 321, Dayville 97825. Phone: 541-987-2188. Fax: 541-987-2187. Email: [dville@ortelco.net](mailto:dville@ortelco.net)
- **John Day** — 450 E. Main St, John Day, 97845. Phone: 541-575-0028. Fax: 541-575-1721. Email: [cityjd@centurytel.net](mailto:cityjd@centurytel.net).
- **Long Creek** — P.O. Box 489, Long

- Creek 97856. Phone: 541-421-3601. Fax: 541-421-3075. Email: [info@cityoflongcreek.com](mailto:info@cityoflongcreek.com).
- **Monument** — P.O. Box 426, Monument 97864. Phone and fax: 541-934-2025. Email: [cityofmonument@centurytel.net](mailto:cityofmonument@centurytel.net).
- **Mt. Vernon** — P.O. Box 647, Mt. Vernon 97865. Phone: 541-932-4688. Fax: 541-932-4222. Email: [cmtv@ortelco.net](mailto:cmtv@ortelco.net).
- **Prairie City** — P.O. Box 370, Prairie City 97869. Phone: 541-820-3605. Fax: 820-3566. Email: [pchall@ortelco.net](mailto:pchall@ortelco.net).
- **Seneca** — P.O. Box 208, Seneca 97873. Phone and fax: 541-542-2161. Email: [senecaoregon@gmail.com](mailto:senecaoregon@gmail.com).



## Grant County's Weekly Newspaper

- Publisher.....Chris Rush, [crush@eomediagroup.com](mailto:crush@eomediagroup.com)
- Editor & General Manager.....Sean Hart, [editor@bmeagle.com](mailto:editor@bmeagle.com)
- Reporter.....Richard Hanners, [rick@bmeagle.com](mailto:rick@bmeagle.com)
- Community News.....Angel Carpenter, [angel@bmeagle.com](mailto:angel@bmeagle.com)
- Sports.....Angel Carpenter, [angel@bmeagle.com](mailto:angel@bmeagle.com)
- Marketing Rep.....Kim Kell, [ads@bmeagle.com](mailto:ads@bmeagle.com)
- Administrative Assistant.....Makenna Adair, [office@bmeagle.com](mailto:office@bmeagle.com)
- Office Assistant.....Alexandra Hand, [office@bmeagle.com](mailto:office@bmeagle.com)

### 1 YEAR SUBSCRIPTION RATES (including online access)

- Grant County .....\$45
- Everywhere else in U.S.....\$57

Subscriptions must be paid prior to delivery

Periodicals Postage Paid at John Day and additional mailing offices.

### POSTMASTER

send address changes to: Blue Mountain Eagle 195 N. Canyon Blvd. John Day, OR 97845-1187 USPS 226-340

Copyright © 2019 Blue Mountain Eagle

All rights reserved. No part of this publication covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or copied in any form or by any means — graphic, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, taping or information storage and retrieval systems — without written permission of the publisher.