

Public records proposal fixes old flaws

The Oregon Legislature created the office of public records advocate in 2017, and Ginger McCall was appointed to the post in January 2018 by Oregon Gov. Kate Brown. One year and nine months later, McCall was gone, having resigned in protest over interference from some on Brown's staff.

Now lawmakers, with the advantage of hindsight, are doing what they should have done in the beginning. They're proposing changes in the current law that will give the public records advocate and Public Records Advisory Council the independence they need.

Members of the state Senate's Interim Committee on General Government and Emergency Preparedness will get a first formal look at the draft legislation when it meets Monday.

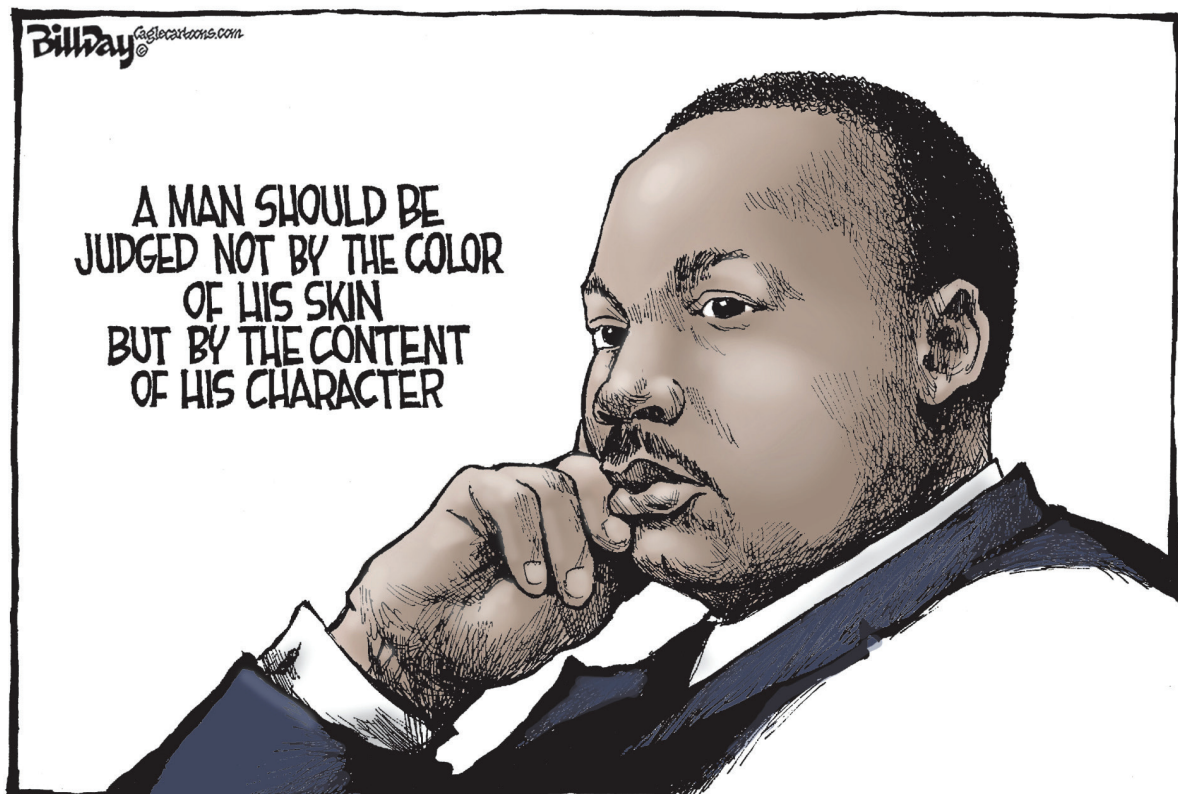
All in all, what's being proposed fixes most of the flaws that McCall's departure exposed. The public records advocate will be independent, appointed by the Public Records Advisory Council and subject to hiring and firing only by the council.

Also, the council itself will have the right to support or oppose legislation as well as to ask lawmakers to introduce legislation for it.

That's particularly important. In her resignation letter to the governor, McCall said she had been pressured by members of the governor's staff to represent the governor's interests, even when they conflicted with those of the advocate and the council. Worse, she was told not to tell anyone about the request.

The proposed changes would make it clear to all that the advocate and the council are, in fact, independent, not answerable to the governor or any other elected official.

One problem still remains in the law, however, and lawmakers should address it in the proposed legislation. Of the 14 members of the Public Records Advisory Council, nine represent government agencies or public employees' labor unions, three are journalists and one is a member of the public. At the very least, the council should have as many members of the press and public as it does of government.



FARMER'S FATE

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

By Brianna Walker
To the Blue Mountain Eagle



Brianna Walker

December flashed in like a lightning bolt, and it seems before anyone could count "one-one thousand, two-one thousand," the thunder is booming with New Year's fireworks. I had been looking forward to that slow time of year — that time when farmers sit around the fireplace, watch old movies and eat bon bons. OK, I know, a pace that slow never happens — unless you break both legs and maybe an arm. But I was still looking forward to sitting around the twinkling lights of the Christmas tree in the evening, playing board games with the kids and making fudge a daily part of the menu.

Our December didn't happen that way, though. Oh sure, our intake ratio of fudge to salad definitely increased, but otherwise our month was every bit as exhausting as the middle of harvest. Each weekend found us hosting another Christmas party. My favorite was our annual tree decorating contest. The shop was cleaned, the work benches lined with wrapping paper and a drop-ceiling of lights hung. Soon, the groups were bidding on random items they were going to use to create the "essence of a Christmas tree." This year our auction included the Hoop Tree, the STEM tree, the Beauty Pageant tree, the DIY tree and the "Oh" Christmas Tree. Our brochure advertised them as such:

The Hoop Tree: Sir Mix a Lot may have been rapping about a '69 Buick, but only because he hadn't met this adorable little Hoop Tree. The bumper isn't the only thing shaking about this rusty, dilapidated little soul. But together with a little electrical tape and love, he is sure to be brought back to his stardom.

The winning group of this tree found themselves the proud owners of three cardboard tubes from the baler rolls of plastic wrap, wire from some old row cover and a roll of electrical tape.

The STEM tree:

This tree allows for experimentation, critical thinking and imagination while working together to create an award-winning solution. But the most important thing to remember is that while you may think you are familiar with STEM — tonight it's more about "Stressing Together Entertains Many."

The winners of this auction tree received a box of giant tinker toys.

The Beauty Pageant Tree: A former Miss Christmas Tree 2015, this stunning little beauty may be beyond the first blush of youth, but she is still spry for her age. She may be past the swim suit contests, but with a little makeup and glitter, she is sure to come back to some aspect of her former beauty.

Dead is such a harsh word — so the winners of this auction received a "formerly alive" Christmas tree from four years ago.

The DIY Tree: DIY activities are all the rage this year, often costing much more than it would have taken to have just bought the product, but it's all about the experience. Avoid the frustration of finding the perfect tree — and just build one that fits.

These auction winners were given a smooth, 15-foot branch hanging from the ceiling, a box of pine boughs and a drill.

And last there was the "Oh" Christmas Tree. A lovely little song of a fir tree makes you want to hum: Oh, Christmas tree, oh, Christmas tree, you scream to cats "Destroy

me!" Your lights are wired improperly. You start on fire randomly. Oh, Christmas tree, oh, Christmas tree, next year you'll be in a compost heap.

These auction winners received the only real tree of the evening.

The creativity and ingenuity this party brings out never ceases to amaze (and amuse) me. The evening passed with much laughter — especially when a life-sized snowman Olaf passed through during the white elephant junk exchange.

It was a good December, just busier than I would have preferred. My youngest son celebrated a birthday, we hosted three Christmas parties, attended a Mannheim Steamroller concert, along with Christmas plays and lights parades. We sold 500 Christmas trees, built wooden toboggans for all our nieces and nephews and wrote a Christmas letter that still hasn't found its way to the mailbox. The letter, which started like this, pretty much summed up our year — including December:

Tumble outta bed and I stumble to the kitchen

*Pour myself a cup of ambition
Yawn and stretch, it's time to hit the grind.*

Jump in the tractor and the oil starts pumpin'

Out in the field the baler starts thumpin'

With farmers like us in the field from 5 to 9.

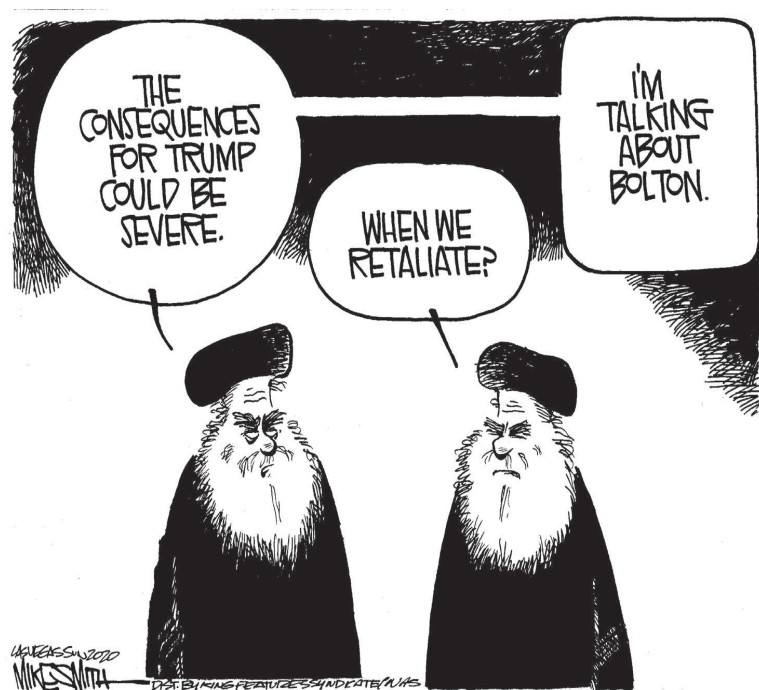
Workin' 5 to 9, it's the way we make our livin'

Barely gettin' sleep, between workin' and some playin'

Keep that coffee pot full, just make sure it's not unleaded

It's enough to drive you crazy if you let it.

So as the fireworks thunder in the New Year, our family wishes everyone a full coffee pot, lots of laughter and more sleep than we got in the previous year!



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By Greg Smith

To the Blue Mountain Eagle



Greg Smith

Employers of any size will benefit from a straightforward, well written employee handbook. This document clearly spells out company policies and expectations as well as provides employees with a tool of reference should questions arise.

When drafting an employee handbook, it is essential that all federal and state employment laws are adhered to and be written in simple language, rather than legalese. It should always contain an employee and manager signature line and date documenting the handbook has been carefully reviewed by the employee and any questions answered by a supervisor.

While it will take time to create the handbook (and keep it updated), there are many benefits to both employer and employee. Examples include:

- By creating uniform expectations, it can lessen workplace

strife and streamline the hiring process.

- The handbook documents company procedures and specific rules regarding dress code, any permitted use

of personal electronic devices, non-discrimination, harassment (and how to file a complaint), compensation and benefits, company holidays, sick leave information, scheduling, etc.

- Discusses consequences, including termination, for violating these expectations.
- It may also offer a level of employer protection in the event of an employee lawsuit.

Helpful content to include in an employee handbook may include:

- Welcome to Our Team
- About Us
- Explanation of "at-will" employment
- Office conduct
- Probationary period
- Specific cell phone and social

media usage rules

- Safety policies
- Payroll schedule/time-card completion
- Performance reviews
- Company benefits and enrollment
- Exit interviews in the event of resignation or termination

Employers should review the handbook on a regular basis and make changes as needed. Additions or revisions may be necessary, and it is also important to remove any policies that are not enforced.

While it is tempting not to have an employee handbook in place when there is a small team, it is well worth the time to avoid aggravation and ensure standards for the business are being met.

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