

# Here's why public records laws matter

There couldn't be a clearer case about both the value and flaws in Oregon's public records law than the current one in Douglas County.

The Oregonian, having spent about \$2,000 to obtain records of how the county spent some \$43,000 in federal Secure Rural Schools Act funds, reported this week on what it found. The newspaper has since been billed another \$693.77 to have a county official spend 13 hours reviewing it so the county could answer questions about records the newspaper received.

The newspaper found plenty. Some of the \$43,000 went to pay a \$75 fee to Sunriver Resort to allow Douglas County Commissioner Tim Freeman to keep a dog in his room. Another \$205 went to the Brix Chill, a Roseburg cocktail lounge and restaurant. The receipt was not itemized, as county policy requires, making it impossible to tell if he had purchased alcohol as part of the meal. County policy forbids the purchase of alcohol with public funds. Freeman also flew first class to Washington, D.C., in 2019 because he was invited on short notice to hear a speech by President Donald Trump. Federal funds paid for part of the upgrade from the standard coach seat that Oregon officials usually use. A county spokeswoman said no coach seats were available for the flight.

If private businesses want to spend their money that

way, it's one thing, but for public officials from a poor county in rural Oregon to do so, it's unconscionable.

We don't know what voters in Douglas County will do about the situation, but one thing is clear. Had it not been for this state's public records law and The Oregonian's willingness to spend nearly \$3,000 getting information that's supposedly available to the public, voters may never have found out about the commission's free-spending ways.

That brings up a problem with the current law. It allows a requester — in this case, The Oregonian — to appeal proposed fees to the local district attorney, Richard Wesenberg. Wesenberg refused to reduce or cancel the fees, arguing that the newspaper's parent company could well afford them. That's despite the law, which says reducing fees is what should be done if making the record public benefits the general public. It's hard to see how spending of government funds doesn't qualify as information that meets that test.

Lawmakers may not have time to change the law so that getting records is both fast and relatively inexpensive in the coming 30-day session. If not, it should be put at the top of the 2021 to-do list. The law does not require means testing to determine if fees should be waived, and public interest, not a requester's financial statement, should be the standard by which the request is judged.



## GUEST COMMENT

# Stalking: Know it, name it, stop it

By Gregory Goebel  
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

**S**talking: Know it, name it, stop it — a powerful theme that challenges communities around the nation to take action and prevent a dangerous crime through education and awareness. January is National Stalking Awareness Month, a time to reflect on a crime that touches families and people across our community and nation.

Stalking is defined as “a pattern of behavior directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear.” The kind of behaviors that can constitute stalking include: harassment, following the victim, unwanted phone calls, leaving threatening messages and spying on the victim.

Stalking is estimated to affect between 6-7.5 million Americans each year. Stalking is a crime that affects everyone, with one in six women and one in 17 men experiencing it

during their lifetime. Young adults are at the greatest risk of being a victim of stalking. Roughly half of all stalking victims are under the age of 25. Over 75% of victims know or are familiar with the person who is stalking them, and former intimate partners comprise a large portion of that number.

In 2018, over 2,063 individuals reported to Oregon sexual and domestic violence programs that they had been the victims of stalking. Unfortunately, many victims of stalking do not report the crime. In fact, only five instances of stalking were reported in Grant and Harney counties in 2018. The underreporting of stalking in our community speaks to the need for greater awareness of this crime in our community.

If you or a loved one are living in fear due to the actions of another, there are programs and resources available to you. There are laws and protective orders that can be utilized

to ensure your well-being and safety.

Oregon allows for victims of stalking to file a petition for a Stalking Protection Order. If the Stalking Protection Order is granted, the perpetrator will immediately lose their right to possess firearms and must immediately turn over any firearms that they possess. Additionally, stalking is a criminal offense under Oregon law and is classified as a Class A misdemeanor. Stalking can be elevated to a Class C felony if the individual has a prior conviction for stalking or if they have previously violated a court's stalking protective order.

If you would like more information about stalking, or are interested in filing a Stalking Protective Order, please contact the Grant County Victim Assistance Program at 541-576-4026 or Heart of Grant County at 541-620-1342.

*Gregory Goebel is the Grant County deputy district attorney.*

## GUEST COMMENT

# An Olympian's guide to the boardroom

By Michael Wilson  
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

**I**'ve hit rock bottom more times than I can count.

As a gymnast, I overcame injuries that would have ended many other athletes' careers — only to watch my Olympic dreams slip out of reach. As a businessman, I built a successful start-up — and then lost it all.

The main thing I've learned? Setbacks can be productive if you're willing to learn from them. Today, as I lead a successful company, I constantly inform my decision-making with the lessons I learned as an athlete and entrepreneur.

First, never give up. When I was 12, I trained under gymnastics coach Ralph Reeves, the toughest coach I ever had. I would spend hours perfecting my craft — getting up on the pommel horse as I tried not to look down at my cracked and bloodied hands. Upon finishing each routine, Coach Reeves would utter one word, “Again.”

As the Junior Olympic Games approached, it looked like my hard work was about to pay off. Then, I blew out my knee and tore my ACL, MCL and meniscus while training. Refusing to

let my injury determine my fate, I went on to win my first national championship.

I eventually graduated from the University of Oklahoma as a five-time All-American and NCAA champion with a spot on the Olympic roster. But due to President Jimmy Carter's boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics, I never got a chance to participate.

I was devastated, but I picked myself up — again — and transitioned to the business world. More setbacks awaited.

Second? Forgive others. In the mid-1980s, I started my first company. But before I knew it, the relationship I had with my business partner soured, and I found myself broke, divorced and living in a tiny apartment on a loan from my ex-father-in-law.

That episode would have been enough for a logical person to never open another business.

Call me illogical. After this incident, I went on to build and sell multiple successful companies. I say this not to brag, but merely to prove my bona fides to other entrepreneurs who are just starting out and facing their own challenges.

It's crucial to forgive your colleagues, your subordinates, even yourself. I didn't dwell on los-

ing my Olympic dreams. I moved on to compete as a businessman. And I didn't vow revenge on my ex-partner, I forgave him.

Finally, trust but verify.

As an athlete, I had to trust and listen to my body, my doctors, my coaches and trainers to overcome my injuries. After my experiences, I've learned to pay very close attention to what people are saying — and, more importantly, what they aren't saying — in the boardroom. Reading body language and getting to know people before you do business with them is just as important as studying their qualifications on paper.

Today, as I lead a business, I spend countless hours strategizing for and planning out my board meetings. Sometimes my preparation lasts three times as long as the actual meeting. But as I learned throughout my athletic experience, preparation is the best way to ensure success.

If you're an entrepreneur, you will eventually experience a business setback. It's inevitable. But the next time you do — pause, make a game plan and think to yourself, “again.”

*Michael Wilson is the CEO of Healthcare Highways. This piece was originally published on InnovationMap.com.*



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## 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: toccc1862@centurylink.net.

• **Dayville** — P.O. Box 321, Dayville 97825. Phone: 541-987-2188. Fax: 541-987-2187. Email: dville@ortelco.net

• **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.

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• **Seneca** — P.O. Box 208, Seneca

97873. Phone and fax: 541-542-2161. Email: senecaoregon@gmail.com.

### SALEM

• **Gov. Kate Brown, D** — 254 State Capitol, Salem 97310. Phone: 503-378-3111. Fax: 503-378-6827. Website: governor.state.or.us/governor.html.

• **Oregon Legislature** — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180. Website: leg.state.or.us (includes Oregon Constitution and Oregon Revised Statutes).

• **Oregon Legislative Information** — (For updates on bills, services, capitol or messages for legislators) — 800-332-2313.

• **Sen. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario** — 900 Court St. NE, S-301, Salem 97301. Phone: 503-986-1730. Website: oregonlegislature.gov/Bentz. Email: Sen.CliffBentz@oregonlegislature.gov.

• **Rep. Lynn Findley, R-Vale** — 900 Court St. NE, H-475, Salem 97301. Phone: 503-986-1460. Website: oregonlegislature.gov/findley. Email: Rep.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov.

### WASHINGTON, D.C.

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

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