

Government officials must keep the people informed

Our system of government by the people for the people does not work when government officials refuse to keep the people informed about their actions.

We elect people to represent us, and we expect the people we elect to act in our collective best interests. We expect them to spend taxpayer dollars wisely. We expect accountability.

Above all, we expect that our leaders will keep us apprised. We expect honest and open dealings — transparency — so we know what our leaders are doing with our money.

It should be more than a little alarming when public officials openly admit they will not answer questions about official policies or programs.

This week, Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer told the Eagle directly he would not answer our questions about the authority of people he has deputized. This is extremely problematic and goes against the tenets of our open system of government.

How can the people hold the government accountable and ensure the public systems are working for the people when they don't know what's going on?

It should be especially concerning when the questions revolve around the rights and responsibilities of people who carry badges and guns on behalf of the county — and even more so when those people are not trained and certified by Oregon's police licensing agency, as is the case with the latest special deputies the Eagle

inquired about.

Should people treat these special deputies as if they are certified law enforcement officers, or are they in a different class? If a special deputy interacts with a citizen, what authority do they have? These are routine questions, and everyone should want to know the answers. The people deserve to know.

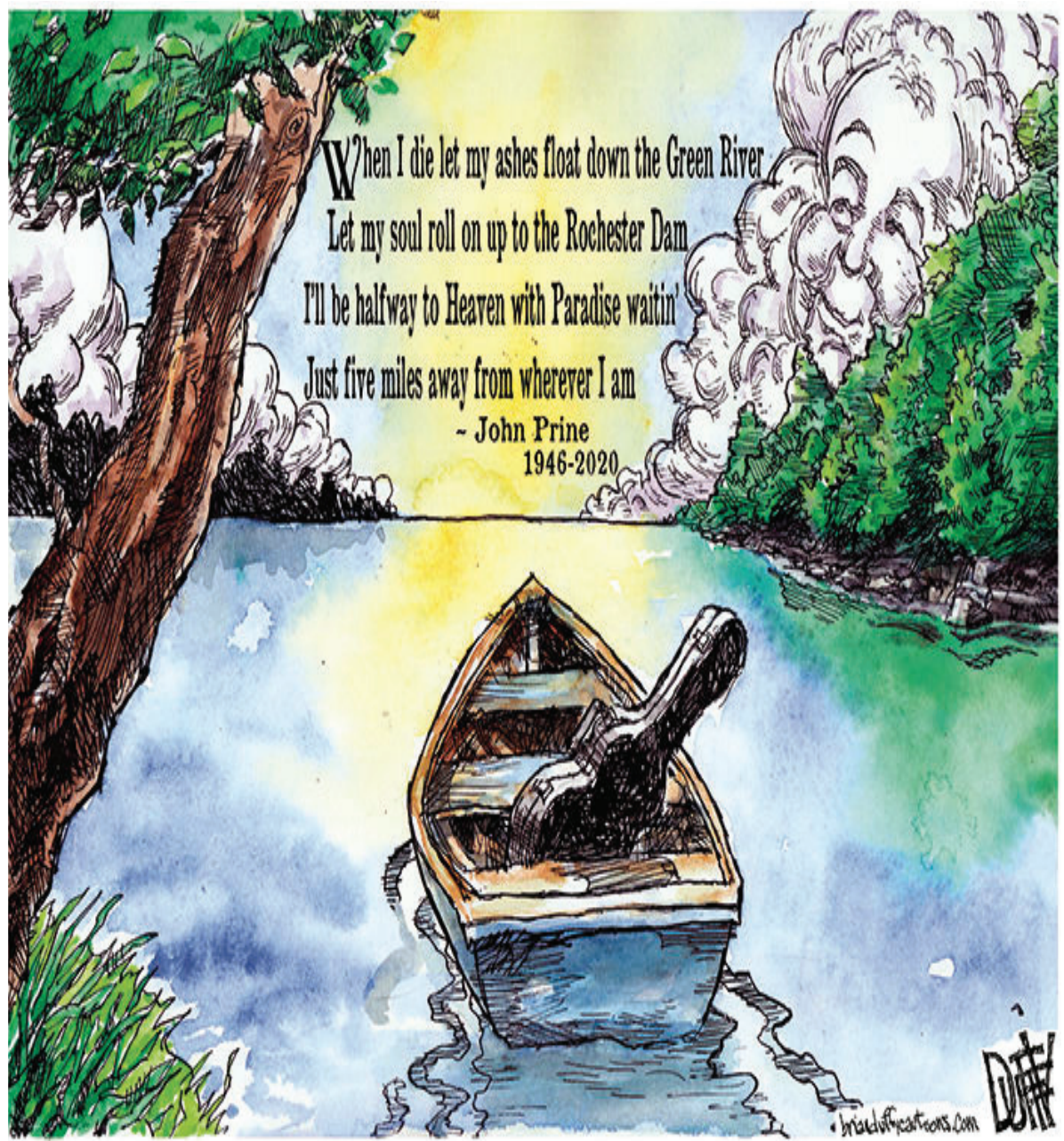
The sheriff refused to even state whether there were other special deputies beyond the two county commissioners the Eagle inquired about. At this point, we only know there are an unknown number of people — with badges — who have unknown authority in the community. The people deserve to know these things.

The sheriff said it has been his policy for some time to not respond to any media requests. He said the coverage has not been fair or accurate.

Yet, the sheriff has not reached out to the Eagle about any inaccuracies. If something is inaccurate, we want to know about it. We don't claim to be perfect and may get something wrong from time to time, but if someone points out something that is inaccurate, we will always get it fixed as quickly as possible.

It's easy to blame the media without offering any specifics on what they got wrong. It helps politicians cast blame and direct attention elsewhere. But it does not inform the people.

Refusing to answer questions about public business is about as far from the ideals upon which our country was founded as one can get. The people deserve better.



GUEST COMMENT

Social distancing working

It's hard to believe that we are already over four weeks into our COVID-19 lifestyle. Tremendous sacrifices have been made across the board. We just celebrated Easter without large family gatherings or in-person church services. Small business owners and those who are laid off are watching their bank accounts dwindle and wondering how they're going to keep the lights on. Young peoples' education has been slowed and their activities put on hold. A full list of the things folks have had to endure would be beyond the scope of this essay. The sacrifices are many, and they just keep getting deeper the longer this goes on.

At the same time, we look around Grant County and see that our hospital is not overwhelmed and wonder if this perhaps all a little over the top. Or could we at least start to relax a bit?

Initial models showed that Oregon would be overwhelmed by mid-April if business as usual was maintained. This is why we undertook social distancing so early and so aggressively here in Oregon. If you look across the country to New York City, you will see that they are digging mass graves for the dead from COVID. The reason isn't that they're so big, or so



Dr. Raffaella Betza

dense, or that so many people came in from abroad. The reason is that they didn't start social distancing as early in their curve as we did here in Oregon. It's as simple

as that. Thanks to our aggressive social distancing, our curve of infections here in Oregon looks more like a plateau. Even better news, we may already be near the top of the plateau. If we keep doing what we're doing, things may never get much worse, and we will start to see real improvement by mid-May.

Now that things look so good and we've already been doing all this social distancing for so long, it's only natural to want to let up a little bit. Many of us are thinking about sneaking in a play date here or a visit to grandma there. Oregon Health Authority has models out at this point that show that, if we were to return to moderate social distancing, we would run out of ICU beds in Oregon by April 28. All of the sacrifices you made thus far will have been nullified by then if we give up too soon.

Before we can start relaxing

social distancing, we need to see new cases in the state get to near zero for an extended period of time. We also need a plan for increased testing and contact tracing capacity. This isn't the last of COVID-19. Moving forward, we need to plan on widespread testing and thorough contract tracing and targeted isolation of individuals and communities with positive tests. This kind of targeted approach just isn't possible yet, and it isn't feasible at a time when the nation as a whole is still adding tens of thousands of new COVID-19 cases each week.

All of which is to say that we deserve a moment to feel proud of our efforts and relieved at the improved outlook. We deserve a moment to grieve for our sacrifices and the loved ones already lost to this disease. We deserve a moment to look forward to a time when we can hug a friend and go to the park. After these moments, we need to look ahead with steady resolve. We're winning this first battle against COVID-19, but it's too soon to declare victory, and the war is just beginning. So please, continue to stay home and safe to flatten the curve.

Dr. Raffaella Betza is the chief of staff for Blue Mountain Hospital District.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Raschio for circuit court judge

To the Editor:

Rob Raschio is an excellent choice for circuit court judge. He is committed to listening to all sides and seeing all angles of an issue in order to find the best solution for the situation. We have worked together many times on many issues. He is firm, but fair, thoughtful, but decisive.

As judge, I know that Rob will continue to uphold this same temperament on the bench to ensure that the community is protected to the best of his ability. I trust Rob wholeheartedly, and he has my full support for judge.

We will be voting for Rob this May and encourage you to do the same.

Sam Palmer
John Day

Raschio would be 'fair and thoughtful'

To the Editor:

Until moving to Grant County about 13 years ago, I had limited knowledge of the inner workings of the court system in general. In the last few years, however,

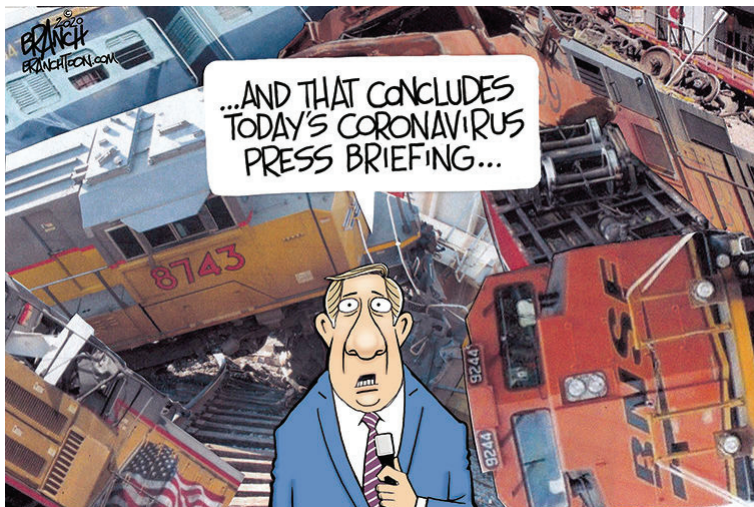
I have witnessed detrimental outcomes in the cases of friends or acquaintances where I actually knew the inside stories. It appeared that

a lack of tenacity on the part of the district attorney's office, or whom ever was supposed to be seeking the best outcome for those parties involved, actually brought harm to either the defendant or the community or both.

I am pleased that Rob Raschio is running for circuit court judge, and from conversations with him, I am confident that he will be fair and thoughtful in his decisions concerning our citizens and community. He has my vote, and I hope that you will consider voting for him as well, so that we can create a positive relationship between our community and the courts.

Mary Brown
Prairie City

LETTERS POLICY: Letters to the Editor is a forum for Blue Mountain Eagle readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters will be asked to be contained to 350 words. No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. No thank-you letters. Submissions to this page become property of the Eagle. The Eagle reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content. Letters must be original and signed by the writer. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. We must limit all contributors to one letter per person per month. Deadline is 5 p.m. Friday. Send letters to editor@bmeagle.com, or Blue Mountain Eagle, 195 N. Canyon Blvd., John Day, OR 97845; or fax to 541-575-1244.



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