

An important pillar in a democracy

The fight for more transparency is more important now than ever before, and one of our most important jobs as a newspaper is to consistently push to ensure the light of clarity shines into every corner of government.

To some extent we have it pretty lucky in Oregon. The state's open records law allows residents — and newspapers — to seek records that may otherwise be kept secret from the public. The law is a crucial pillar in our democracy, though it is consistently tinkered with by lawmakers.

Just as consistently, newspapers and other legitimate news outlets must remind readers and lawmakers that in a democracy the workings of government and elected leaders are open to public review. That's how democracy works, and remains one of its fundamental themes. The people — not bureaucrats or elected officials — oversee government. Bureaucrats and lawmakers serve at the discretion and pleasure of the people. Not the other way around.

Since the deadly Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, America has gradually — and in some cases, readily — moved away from open government. The terrorists that slammed jets into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon killed thousands of innocent people, but they also helped trigger a new era of secrecy, where documents and records that should rightfully

be accessible to the public are hidden.

Some secrets — even in a democracy — are justifiable. A top-secret military experiment should be shrouded from the public view. Anything that can harm our nation's security and give our enemies an upper hand should be hidden.

Yet, that is most likely the only justifiable secret in a democracy.

As we stated, Oregonians are fortunate in that our public records law allows for a reasoned and precise method to attain records regarding specific subjects that are important to the public. As a rule — there are, of course, always exceptions — bureaucratic institutions, such as governments, err on the side of secrecy always. That means somewhere a person not elected can decide arbitrarily to keep a document hidden.

That is where our public records law comes into play. Make no mistake, the public records process isn't an easy one, and if a specific state agency wants to fight such a request, it can lead to court battles and large expenses.

Why should a public agency fight to keep records away from the public in court? They shouldn't, but they often do.

Nothing is more important in a democracy than transparency. When a government agency or lawmaker fights a public record request, the first question should be: What are they trying to hide?



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FARMER'S FATE

Cock-a-Doodle-Ewe



Brianna Walker

We were both still thinking about the mouth-watering recipes and the subsequent dry toast when we went out that evening to feed the summer lambs. As soon as we entered, the barn erupted in a

rooster on her back. She actually acts a bit aggressive if you try to get too close to her unusual friend.

Once the bottles are empty, and the grain is gone, the barn kerfuffle lessens. The rooster folds his head under his wing and closes his eyes as his ewe goes back to quietly chewing her cud while her babies nurse.

Everyone says to work your way up the ladder — and apparently the rooster has climbed his — elevating his position from mere rooster, to ruler of the barn with a simple cock-a-doodle-ewe. It isn't the highest roost in the barn, but he is never without a friend who is bigger than him.

When you own your own farming operation, you don't spend much time thinking about "climbing the ladder." But every farm has a one — and maybe we should take a few minutes to climb one every now and again. It doesn't matter if it's a step ladder or if a few rungs are baler-twined together. It may not even reach the barn rafters, but every ladder has some breath-taking scenery and I'm willing to bet a quirky friend that makes life worth living.

I married mine. And although he buys clothes he never washes, and I collect recipes I never use — he's the perfect scenery in this farm life we have made together. He's the bin to my forklift, the water to my ski, the rooster to my ewe.

Here's to climbing your ladder and finding that quirky friend, who's always got your back — literally.

Brianna Walker occasionally writes about the Farmer's Fate for the Blue Mountain Eagle.

cacophony of voices. The hens tsk-tsked us for disturbing them. Former bumper ewes pushed close for a possible taste of milk while other ewes bawled to their babies to keep their distance. The bumper lambs squealed with delight at their upcoming meal. The cat purred mischievously, trying to "accidentally" knock over the bottles of milk. Through all these sounds though, the most disgruntled of all was the rooster. While all the other chickens roost in the rafters of the barn — the rooster sleeps on the back of his favorite ewe. Night feeding is his least favorite time.

He grumbles and fluffs his feathers when she stands up, but his eyes usually stay closed — probably hoping it's just a bad dream. Then as she lumbers over to see us he really starts to flap and talk. Which often piques the interest of the lambs who then will poke their face in his beak or occasionally paw their hooves at his back. He dislikes this very much, and will begin letting out loud squawks to express his disapproval of his bed moving. The bigger the commotion, the higher his voice seems to get — a bit reminiscent of Barney Fife. But the ewe doesn't seem to mind the angry

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Ecologist in the forest

To the Editor:
I agree with Mr. Wuerthner in his comment that forests are restored by natural processes. That's about all, though. The forest ecosystems started changing dramatically when white man hit the East Coast and haven't stopped changing ever since. He points out a lot of problems that contribute to where we are today, but I don't hear any answers to them.

Sounds as if he is against the Malheur collaborative because logging is part of the possible problem-solving ideas. Remember for the past 30-40 years the environmentalists have guided and directed the Forest Service in doing their work. Now we can't see the forest for the trees. I'm glad to see that there are some folks trying to work together to find answers for our man-made problems. We should remember, man can't live without nature, but nature can do without man.

Ken Koser
Prairie City

'We work to save the kittens, not to kill them'

To the Editor:
I am discovering there is a misconception among people in Grant County that if they call Hope 4 Paws and give their kittens to us, or let us know when neighbors or school friends have kittens they don't want or can't keep, that we will take them to a shelter where they will be euthanized. It seems that the word "shel-

ter" has an association with big city shelters where there are so many unwanted pets they simply run out of room and resources to keep them, and have to save the ones that they can, and so they put the overflow to sleep.

I read that there are about 500,000 cats euthanized every year in the United States alone, so why do you think we are working so hard in helping people to spay and neuter their cats in Grant County? There will always be more cats than people want, but we always hope for fewer kittens that end up being thrown into a pasture or even near a barn where they are often just lunch for the hawks or coyotes. Just giving them away often means that we will be trying to trap their offspring next year as everyone who takes a kitten isn't able to really care for it, and then it gets abandoned or neglected.

There are two "shelters" in Deschutes County, and we mostly use Bright Side in Redmond, where there are wonderful folks who do the best job in finding the right home for each cat or kitten that we take over. They have a vet on staff, a great facility and a much larger population of folks who can give the animals a safe and forever home.

At these shelters they don't euthanize an animal unless it is suffering, which is much better than throwing away unwanted pets or moving away and leaving them with no resources to slowly die.

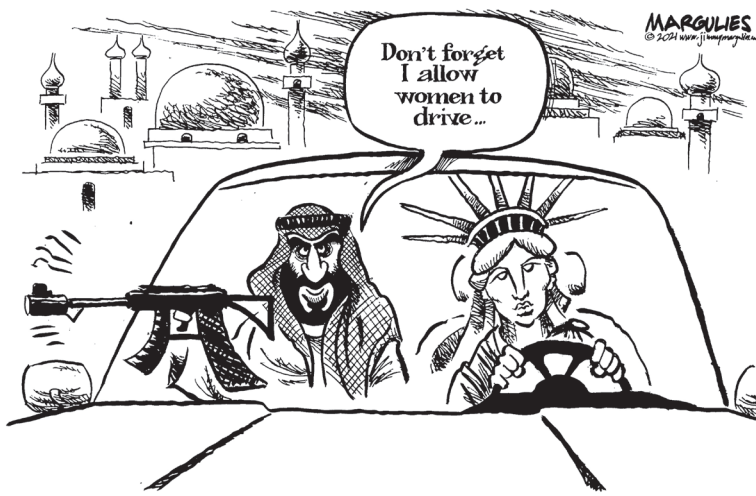
We can only hope that people will get the message that they can be part of the solution to the cat "over" population, and not part of the problem. We work to save the kittens, not to kill them.

Mary Brown, a volunteer
Prairie City

Wear a mask to protect others

To the Editor:
Something I hear from local politicians is that people have the common sense to wear a mask if it's their choice but resent the government mandate. I want to believe that. But then stuff like the recent "Burn the Mask" protests in our next-door state of Idaho demonstrate that the common sense choice of many is "never, ever." I doubt that, when Idaho lifts the mask mandate, all those folks are going to run out and replace their burnt masks and start wearing them. Yet, people can easily be a carrier, walking around for several days before they show symptoms. People can easily be a carrier while having no symptoms at all. Yes, we can wear a mask hanging around our neck, and pull it up if an elderly person walks into the room. What if it is someone who has an elderly relative living at home, unbeknownst to us? What if someone has a weakened immune system or a lung condition that we are not aware of? We all teach our children to respect others, to cover their mouth when they cough, etc. This is no different. There are laws about driving recklessly. We care that a careening car on a public road can cause great harm to others, maybe to someone we love. If it was only your own health that was at stake, forgoing a mask would be a risk for you alone. You will probably be fine. It's how the choice to opt out can potentially, unwittingly affect others that is the issue.

Marie Bryant
Prairie City



MARGULIES

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- GRANT COUNTY**
- **Grant County Courthouse** — 201 S. Humbolt St., Suite 280, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-987-0059. 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.
 - **Dayville** — P.O. Box 321, Dayville 97825. Phone: 541-987-2188. Fax: 541-987-2187. Email: dville@ortelco.net
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 - **Monument** — P.O. Box 426, Monument 97864. Phone and fax: 541-934-2025. Email: cityofmonument@centurytel.net.
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 - **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.
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