

# Across the aisle in the Capitol

Policy disagreements, partisanship and the walkouts can give Oregonians a distorted picture of what their Oregon Legislature is like. Journalists — and certainly this editorial page — tend to highlight conflicts, not the places of accord.

We were struck recently by what state Rep. Daniel Bonham said during a committee hearing about a resolution to honor former state Rep. Mitch Greenlick. State Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, is one of the resolution's sponsors.

Bonham is a Republican from The Dalles. His district includes a large part of Central Oregon — Sisters, Culver, Madras and the Warm Springs Reservation. Plot Bonham and Greenlick along an ideological line and there would be a big gap between them in how to solve many of Oregon's challenges. Bonham would be on the right. Greenlick, a Democrat who represented Multnomah and Washington counties beginning in 2002, was on the left. Greenlick died while serving in office on May 15, 2020.

They became friends. Bonham was appointed to the Legislature in November 2017 to fill a vacancy. He came into the session in 2018 trying to find his way in the new role.

He happened to stay in the same hotel for the session as Greenlick and his wife, Harriet. They fell into the habit of exercising together in the gym

and joining each other in the pool. And talking.

"I got to know Rep. Greenlick more on a personal level than anything else," Bonham said. "What really impressed me was just his care and concern for helping somebody brand new to this role that truly was trying to find their way. And despite the fact that we were not of the same party affiliation or shared the same views on how to solve health care problems, we had many wonderful conversations.

"I will say we probably talked more about the kids, the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren than we did about public policy. But his care and his compassion for others was just evident in his approach to life. And we saw it come through in very passionate ways both on the floor and in committee and even over lunch.

"I wanted to take the moment to stop by your meeting here today and to offer my words of just gratitude to the Greenlicks. Again, I don't know how you talk about Mitch without talking about Harriet. I don't know how, at least from my experience. They were such a team. I am grateful for their friendship and for the kindness that they showed me. I give my absolute support to SCR (Senate Concurrent Resolution) 3 and encourage everyone else to take a moment and read through it and remember and honor our good friend Mitch Greenlick."



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## GUEST COMMENT

# Let government know who's boss

When government fails, it's the rare public official who says, "Oops. My fault."

That's human nature, particularly for officials in the public eye who may have to run for office again. No one wants to be held directly responsible for letting the public down.

Case in point is the recent catastrophe in Texas, when unexpected winter storms left 4 million homes without power, ruptured pipes and tainted the water supply for many.

Texas' energy grid essentially collapsed. While Texas Gov. Greg Abbott was quick to blame frozen wind turbines, the cause was much more complex than that. To truly understand how things went so terribly wrong will require time, study and research.

So, too, with the coronavirus vaccine distribution. In this state and others, residents are frustrated with the slow rollout of vaccines. Is it poor distribution? Politics? A flawed strategy? These are literally matters of life and death.

But how do you get to the truth when public officials so rarely step up to take direct responsibility for failures?

The answer is public records. And public meetings. And access to the information that taxpayers deserve.

States throughout the country have laws that guarantee access to government records and meetings.



Ken Paulson

But the details vary widely and there are many statutory exceptions. New challenges to access emerge every year in virtually every state.

The need to fight for government transparency is reaffirmed each year during Sunshine Week, a national awareness event overseen by the News Leaders Association and keyed to the March 16 birthday of James Madison. The fourth president of the United States drafted the Bill of Rights — including the guarantee of a free press — in 1791.

That journalism connection reflects the role news media play in the free flow of information, but it unfortunately can also leave the public with a sense that Sunshine Week reflects the concerns of a single industry.

To the contrary, access to government information is critical to every American who cares about the quality of his or her community, state and nation.

It's important to see government employees — including elected officials — as the people we hire through our tax dollars to do a good job for all of us. If you run a business or hire a contractor, you wouldn't hesitate to demand a full understanding of how something went wrong. That should be exactly our relationship with government.

Getting that information, though, requires public meetings where residents can ask questions. It also means access to the documents that led to a poor decision. Words on paper can be much more forthright than the dissembling of politicians.

It's critical that we hold government accountable, for better or worse. (It's also important to acknowledge when government leaders are doing a good job.)

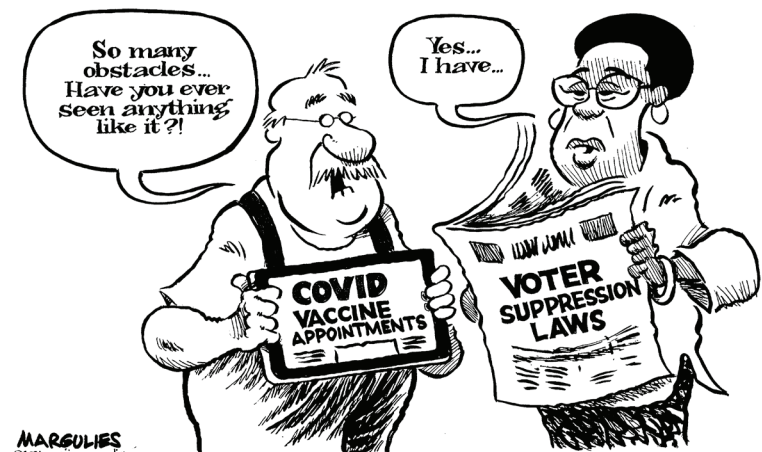
How can you help? I have two suggestions.

First, keep doing exactly what you're doing at this moment. Read and support your local newspaper. Local journalists, more than anyone else, will stand up for your right to information. Facebook will not be going toe-to-toe with your mayor.

Second, when you believe government isn't doing its job, demand an explanation. Ask to see the documents. Attend public meetings. And above all, support legislative efforts to make government more transparent.

It's too easy for officials who have failed us to point fingers, blame the media and wait for their side of the partisan fence to rally to their defense. We deserve better. We all pay taxes to support the work of government. We should get our money's worth.

Ken Paulson is the director of the Free Speech Center at Middle Tennessee State University, a lawyer and a former editor-in-chief of USA Today.



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### 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.

## Insanity in Salem

To the Editor:

In case you missed it, our Democrat brain trust in Salem has introduced HR 3305, which would prohibit the sale of both retail and wholesale petroleum based diesel fuel. Has anyone over there thought what this would do to trucking, farming, logging and construction? Hopefully, this will never get out of committee, but I have seen junk like this go through committee and be voted on in the around-the-clock rush that goes on in the final days of a session. If you have friends or relatives in the West side, please ask them to contact their representatives and senators to stop this insanity.

Ralph Goodwin  
John Day

## The cancel cops

To the Editor:

Recently I learned a friend of mine had an opinion stated on Facebook canceled. It was canceled because it was called hate

speech. My friend's opinion stated essentially that, "If our people had not had the back bone to stand up during our past wars, we may now be speaking a different national language." This is a simple statement of fact. Do you see the hate in that statement?

The "cancel cops" may see hate in my friend's statement, so I have a couple more opinions they may be afraid of. But I warn them, once they've been read they are in your head. So cancel that.

Abe Lincoln said in a speech in 1838, "All the armies of Europe, Asia, and Africa combined with all the treasure of the earth in their military chest, and a Bonaparte for commander could not by force take a drink from the Ohio or make a track on the Blue Ridge in a trial of a thousand years."

"At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us, it cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author

and finisher. As a nation of free-men, we must live through all time or die by suicide."

Here are a few more they might want to ponder.

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." — Martin Luther King Jr.

The following are from a couple of individuals we should never forget!

"Give me four years to teach the children and the seed I have sown will never be uprooted." — Vladimir Lenin

"Let me control the textbooks and I will control the state." — Adolf Hitler

The Constitution of the United States of America is the supreme law of our land and according to the First Amendment, "... no law shall be made abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press..."

Oh and here's one of my own, "Stand up — don't be afraid, be aware. Express yourself. It's your right."

Michael R. Christensen  
John Day

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**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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