

Pass bill to ensure transparency about COVID-19

Oregon state Sen. Mike Dembrow, D-Portland, has been noisy about the need for the Oregon Health Authority to be transparent about the COVID-19 data it releases.

His bill, Senate Bill 719, would ensure that transparency. And though the bill should have long since passed the Oregon Legislature, it would seem to be in good hands. It's in the committee Dembrow chairs, Joint Ways and Means.

The central premise of Oregon's public records law is that the public has a right to know what its government is doing. Meetings are open to the public. Government documents and the data behind them should be open to the public if requested.

As good as Oregon's law is, it teems with exceptions. One is for public health investigations, Oregon Revised Statutes 433.008. It reads in part: "Information obtained by the Oregon Health Authority or a local public health administrator in the course of an investigation of a reportable disease

or disease outbreak is confidential and is exempt from disclosure." So when journalists and others have requested information about testing rates by ZIP code, for instance, the request was denied.

ORS 433.008 doesn't mean that the information must be denied to the public. It means it can be denied. And when government can deny the public information, it often does.

Dembrow's bill simply requires the Oregon Health Authority or local public health administrator to release aggregate information about reportable disease investigations that does not identify individual cases or sources of information after receiving a public records request. This would not only apply to COVID-19. It would also apply to salmonella and E. coli outbreaks.

State officials are trying to encourage Oregonians to get vaccinated and continue to obey COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines. It would send the wrong signal for the Legislature to now tell Oregonians, "Let's keep the secrecy," and not pass this bill.



GUEST COMMENT

One community, one fight

John Day City Council

The time has come to put aside our differences and work together toward common goals and a unified mission.

The John Day City Council has identified and begun combating the complex issues that have led to a steady decline in the county's population and growing poverty over the last 30 years. Over a thousand residents have moved out of our area. As a result, Main Street businesses were closing, jobs diminishing and our tax base was flat. In some cases, revenues had decreased to the point we could no longer fund basic services.

Four years ago, we recognized that we could no longer continue to operate the way we used to. Too few homes were being built, the age and condition of our housing stock and infrastructure was deteriorating and, without a deliberate change in our policies and procedures, we were going to continue losing ground.

We realized we had to do things differently.

We needed to run the city more like a business. We had to get leaner, more efficient and more strategic in our investment decisions. We had to start looking further down the road at what was coming next so we would be better prepared. We needed to act now to start repairing our core infrastructure like our wastewater treatment plant and our aging roads and bridges before it was too late.

The city of John Day has worked hard toward these goals. We recognized we needed to get back the population we had lost, and to do so, we also needed to create new amenities that people want — parks and trails along our riverfront, more buildable commercial and residential lands and basic building blocks of a 21st century economy like broadband internet.

As a result of these policy changes and others, John Day grew in population last year for the first time in over two decades, and we are gaining new private sector development at a pace we haven't seen in many years.

We maintain the belief that what is good for one community in Grant County is good for them all. For this reason, we have looked beyond our city boundaries, raising nearly \$10 million dollars to build high-speed internet to the other cities in the county and offering \$30,000 in free water to Prairie City residents when their well failed. There has never been a greater need for collaboration to get back to a sustainable quality of life.

Roads and bridges in John Day are driven on by all county residents and continue to deteriorate faster than we can repair them, while the County Court sits on over \$50 million in federal funding that was specifically dedicated for these uses, intentionally withholding their resources from our residents.

County Judge Scott Myers has repeatedly ignored our efforts to meet with him to discuss these issues on the

pretext that it requires a legal review, which he has not produced and is not necessary. To encourage him to act, our attorneys sent him our own legal opinion, which so far he has ignored.

As a result of the county's deliberate neglect, our residents might have to go into debt to repair flood damage to Fourth Street, a critical access road to the Grant County Regional Airport used by firefighters, the local hospital and county residents.

While Judge Myers has been clear about his unwillingness to meet with the city of John Day, the other commissioners have not acted decisively. Our families in every community in Grant County deserve better than this! We can and must work together to fulfill our oath of office to serve our residents.

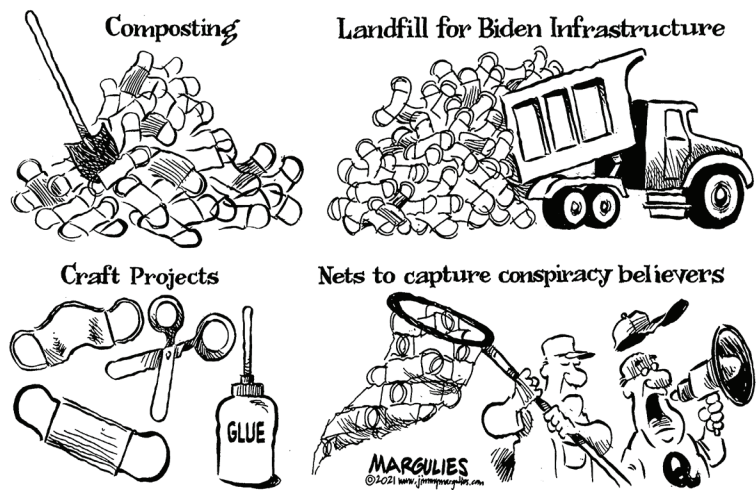
We call on our residents and all responsible citizens in Grant County to contact Judge Myers, Commissioner Jim Hamscher and Commissioner Sam Palmer to encourage them to stand with us in our fight to rebuild our community.

One community. One fight. We remain dedicated to our mission to serve John Day residents and ask you to join us in asking our elected officials to recommit to working together.

The John Day City Council includes Mayor Ron Lundbom, Council President Paul Smith and Councilors Shannon Adair, Gregg Haberly, Dave Holland, Elliot Sky and Heather Rookstool.

CDC UPDATES OUTDOOR MASK WEARING

How to use those discarded masks:



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

John Day should get 'its act together'

To the Editor:
There are so many things wrong with the city of John Day's (CJD) budget this go around. It appears to me that the administration has come up with a different view of their recent town hall meeting than I walked away with. First off, their minds were made up before the meeting. My take was that the fine folks wanted the administration to scale down project creation and focus on mainly the wastewater project. However, the CJD chose only to act on the police department problem. While they left out the alternative version to a solution of tightening their budget and funding their police department with a little less spent in all areas of the city. Going through their proposed budget in the police funding I noticed that there was a statement that read "we no longer have reserve funds from the 9-1-1 account ... to draw on to offset operating costs." The question in my mind, have they been pulling 9-1-1 funds in the past to fund the police? The current budget has some infused funding, which came as a surprise to me last year, and this year also budgeted, I think, \$24.00 to close that line item. The town hall meeting was a short-term fix and now, as all of Mayor Lundbom's funding estimates, increase when an actual figure comes up before the electorate. This has turned out now to be another long-term spending spree to his constituents which was not what was brought up at the meeting. Bait and switch.

In a reply to a letter to the editor in last week's Eagle, why Grant County Court should not fund any part of the CJD's bad budgeting and spending plan disguised as economic growth: First was 9-1-1 mis-managed funds (now under control but more is needed); the Fourth Avenue road work, \$400,000; another \$220,000 then turned into \$250,000 for private land development. In the past a \$4.5 million pool project turned to \$6.5 million plus \$90,000 in perpetuity. No, the county should not spend a dime until the CJD gets its act together.

Bob Pereira
John Day

'Commonsense or nonsense?'

To the Editor:
Open our borders to more illegal aliens. Open our prisons and set free the criminals because they might catch COVID-19. Legalize drugs so there are more people in our towns and on our streets that may be a threat to our families and homes. Then defund our police or tell them to stand down when these people threaten the law-abiding citizens in their own homes and businesses. Then, in the name of safety, take away the people's right to a quick response to defend themselves and their families in their own homes against those you have allowed free reign. Your legislation is wrong and House Bill 2510 will make common criminals out of the common citizen while the real criminals, who will in no way abide by locking up their weapons, have no fear while breaking into the disarmed people's homes. Does this make sense? Is it commonsense or nonsense? I think commonsense is dead in the street!

Mike Christensen
John Day

Present-day laws were once resisted

To the Editor:
Oregon is presently now No. 1 in COVID-19 infections in the country, and here in Grant County the known number is over 500.

Here is a short list of present-day laws that were, at first, resisted and fought against, and are now taken for granted as they do work and do save millions of lives a year: operating room masks; smoking restrictions; speed limits; seat belts; restaurant health codes; no shoes, no shirt, no service; machine guns; safety glass; noise ear protection; driver's licenses; passports; stop signs; the right to vote; segregation; equal education; littering; spitting on the floor; freedom of religion. These are now the present and totally accepted. And, the present mandate for closures, masks and distancing is only temporary. If we follow them!

Otherwise, we will continue to get what we resist: sickness and death.

Jim Bay
John Day

'Be part of that change'

To the Editor:
I understand folks in Grant County wanting a government and representation that more closely resembles the conservative values and ideals of Eastern Oregonians. But for those of you who have not spent years living in Idaho, have you thought through what living under Idaho politics truly means? Are you ready to pay an additional 6% sales tax for already expensive groceries? Or an additional 6% for ATVs, or that really nice four-door four-wheel drive truck? And you will be paying 6% on your Amazon purchases as well.

I can even understand a lot of you not caring that medical marijuana or recreational marijuana will promptly go away. But with the re-criminalizing of it, along will come the Idaho justice system, who's laws are much harsher than the current Oregon ones. What does that mean? That means that instead of six months in jail or a couple of years in prison, the sentence will follow Idaho's structure, and they will be sentenced to five years fixed and 15 years indeterminate time (parole). How does that actually play out? Seventy percent of Idaho inmates serve all of their sentences. So while you might think that the sales tax dollars are going for a better education system, instead the money is going to keep guys locked up for years.

Becoming a part of "Greater Idaho" is not the answer. If you really want to live in Idaho, please just move there and experience it for yourself. No? If you like what you have here in Oregon, then work to change the politics. Get busy writing letters on a weekly, or even daily, basis to your representative like my wife does, who did grow up in Idaho. If you want things to change, then step up to the plate and be a part of that change.

I don't want to go back to paying 6% sales tax on every purchase. No! do I want to return to living in a state that my brother's brother-in-law (a former attorney) describes as not just being conservative, but being militantly ultra-conservative. It is called "My Private Idaho" for a reason.

Thomas Harris
Prairie City

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