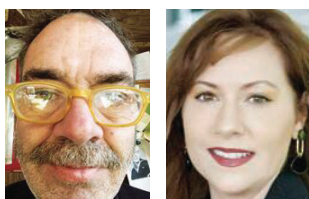


# Baker City man claims defamation

By JAYSON JACOBY  
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Jason Bland Kerry McQuisten

BAKER CITY — Jason Bland, a member of Baker City's budget committee who sometimes speaks with slurred speech due to multiple sclerosis, contends Mayor Kerry McQuisten defamed him by suggesting that he was drunk when he left voice mails on her cellphone recently.

Bland has given McQuisten a letter demanding that she write an email retracting her statements. Bland also wrote that he would consider taking "appropriate legal action against" McQuisten if she does not retract her statements.

Bland also attended the City Council meeting on Tuesday evening, Oct. 12 and repeated his request to McQuisten.

McQuisten didn't respond to Bland during the meeting. In a phone interview Tuesday afternoon, Bland said he wants McQuisten to acknowledge that she was wrong in assuming he was intoxicated when he left the voice mails, and to apologize.

"She's defamed me, and she's done it on purpose," Bland said. "I don't want somebody like that being my mayor."

Bland said McQuisten could have avoided the conflict by returning his phone calls.

"I just wanted a call," he said. "If she had just called me

back, none of this would have happened. I really just wanted to talk to her about the party."

Bland means the Baker County Republican Party, for which McQuisten is an elected precinct committee person.

Bland has also sought to talk to McQuisten about her decision to not support Randy Daugherty's application to fill a vacancy on the City Council.

In an Oct. 5 email to Bland, McQuisten wrote: "I have certainly not defamed you by attempting to follow the proper City process ... I think we are clear now that gathering my private information online, publishing the source in the paper so others could obtain my private information, or repeatedly calling on my personal cell phone at home are not appropriate. Thanks in advance for honoring that."

In the Oct. 5 email, McQuisten explained why she mentioned Bland's voice mails to Cannon.

"It is my job to bring concerns about any of our board or committee members to the

council as a body to handle properly; however, as I mentioned multiple times (as was the reason for my not once mentioning your name or the issue specifics publicly) my desire was the quickest, most discrete resolution during which you would have been involved."

McQuisten mentioned the voice mails during a Council work session Sept. 23, but she didn't refer to Bland by name.

McQuisten also brought the issue to City Manager Jon Cannon, who listened to Bland's voice mails. Cannon subsequently sent an email on Sept. 24 to the five other City Council members in which he outlined what the mayor had told him.

In the email, Cannon wrote that McQuisten had told him Bland had called her on her city-issued phone and on her personal cellphone, although she had asked him not to use her personal number.

"She expressed concerns because the phone messages sound as though Mr. Bland has slurred speech and may be drunk or impaired," Cannon wrote in the email to councilors. "I have heard three of the messages and can confirm in two of them the speech is slurred and certainly sounds as though some sort of impairment is apparent."

Cannon also referred in the email to McQuisten's allegation that Bland instigated a "social

media smear campaign" against city councilor Lynette Perry, who resigned in August due to health issues, and that McQuisten "believed him (Bland) to be drunk at the launch of that campaign as well."

Bland denies that allegation. Cannon's email continues: "The Mayor expressed concerns about Mr. Bland serving on the Budget Board if he does have a drinking problem and is taking action against councilors and calling her personal phone while impaired."

Cannon's email lists five potential options for councilors "in no particular order."

- Take no action.
- Discuss the issue in a Council meeting
- Replace Mr. Bland on the Budget Board
- Instruct staff to research additional information
- Individually meet with Mr. Bland to discuss the situation.

Later that day — Sept. 24 — Bland phoned Cannon to explain his medical condition and to refute McQuisten's claims.

Cannon then sent a second email to councilors, about two and a half hours after the first, noting what Bland had said in the phone call.

"He informed me that he suffers from a medical condition that slurs his speech," Cannon wrote in the second email. "He indicated that he does not

drink but sometimes when he speaks his speech slurs. His condition became apparent as we were having a conversation on the phone.

"He wanted it to be very clear to City Council that he is interested in serving the city and considers himself an upright and respectable citizen here in Baker City," Cannon wrote in the second email, referring to Bland. "He intently shared his desire to assist and do what's right on the budget board and for the city."

"He indicated that he is trying to reach the mayor to discuss the applicant Randy Daugherty (Daugherty) for City Council. He indicated he found her phone numbers on truepeople.com"

McQuisten responded to Cannon's second Sept. 24 email, following his phone conversation with Bland, writing: "Thank you for letting us know. The cyberstalking and bizarre calls at my home were creepy at best."

Bland said he hand-delivered a letter to McQuisten during the Council's Sept. 28 meeting, in which he accuses the mayor of defaming him.

"I demand that you immediately cease and desist from making any and all false and defamatory statements against me," Bland wrote in the letter to McQuisten. "I also demand that you publish a retraction of

all these false statements in the form of an email to me, Mr. Cannon and all City Council Members by October 6, 2021. If you do not cease and desist immediately, and if you do not provide a retraction by October 6, 2021, I may be forced to take appropriate legal action against you and seek all available damages and remedies."

Bland said in a phone interview Tuesday afternoon that he was upset that McQuisten, after receiving Cannon's second email, explaining the source of Bland's slurred speech, failed to concede that she was wrong in assuming Bland was intoxicated.

Instead, Bland noted, McQuisten repeated her accusation that Bland had engaged in cyberstalking and described his actions as "bizarre" and "creepy at best."

In his letter to McQuisten, Bland addressed those claims.

"I do not know what you mean by 'cyberstalking,' but I do not engage in any stalking behaviors," Bland wrote. "That you find phone calls from constituents asking for information 'bizarre' and 'creepy at best' is unacceptable. As an elected official, a County Republican Precinct Committee Person, and a candidate for governor, please respond to a constituent's inquiries rather than defame them — especially after their disability is revealed."

## Limits lifted at Malheur Reservoir

Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — Due to low water levels, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has canceled all size limits and daily limits for anglers at Malheur Reservoir south of Baker City through Dec. 31.

The reservoir has very limited water due to low winter and spring precipitation and exceptionally warm temperatures. ODFW staff have observed fish kills during previous winters when such conditions exist. Based on the developing La Nina and associated projections for a cooler winter, ODFW believes there is a high likelihood that conditions in the reservoir will become lethal for fish this winter.

"I'm not one to take lightly the liberalization of limits and gear restrictions but given the current water levels and past experience we expect fish will die during the winter due to low oxygen levels," said

Dave Banks, ODFW's district fish biologist. "My goal with the removal of limits and gear restrictions is to provide opportunities for anglers to use these fish."

ODFW plans to restock the reservoir next spring to begin rebuilding the fishery. Malheur Reservoir is a productive waterbody that will grow fingerling rainbow trout, three to four inches long, stocked in the spring into eight- to 11-inch fish by the fall. Those same fish will be 14 to 16 inches by their second fall in the reservoir.

Low water levels during the fall and ice in winter creates a low oxygen level situation that could be lethal for fish. When the reservoir surface freezes, it will trap any remaining oxygen under the ice.

"This would give the fish a very low oxygen supply to persist throughout the winter and normally results in fish dying under the ice," Banks said.

## 'Food trail' showcases farms

By KYLE SPURR  
The Bulletin

BEND — A new self-guided tour through the farmlands of Central Oregon will allow participants to enjoy the food produced in the region. The High Desert Food Trail, which launched Friday, takes people on a tour of 45 different stops through Deschutes, Jefferson and Crook counties.

The stops include farms and ranches, craft beverage producers, cooking schools and vineyards.

"We are really excited to collaborate with other farms in Central Oregon to share our rich agricultural lands with our community and visitors," said Sarahlee Lawrence, owner of Rainshadow Organics, a 200-acre farm outside of Sisters.

Lawrence, 39, was born at the farm, which her family started in 1970. She and her husband, Ashanti Samuels, opened



Dean Guernsey/The Bulletin

Melody Luloff organizes produce in the farm store at Rainshadow Organics.

a farm store on the property in 2015. At the store, Lawrence offers meats, grains and vegetables all raised on her farm. Participants on the food trail are encouraged to visit Friday and Saturday each week, when the store is open and meals are served, she said.

"We call it farm-driven cuisine," Lawrence said. "We really are cooking what we

grow, and it changes every week, every season."

Lawrence is familiar with other food trails in Oregon, including one in Hood River called the Fruit Loop.

She is thrilled her farm is on the new trail. It helps people find her farm, which like many other farms is off the beaten path, she said.

The High Desert Food Trail was created by the High Desert Food and Farm Alliance and Travel Oregon, which runs the Oregon Food Trails. The new trail joins eight other Oregon Food Trails throughout the state, and is the second east of the Cas-

cade Mountains.

A map of the trail is available on the food and farm alliance website.

Annie Nichols, who organized the trail for the food and farm alliance, said brochures with the map will be available at Travel Oregon visitor centers across the state and the Redmond Airport.

The goal is to promote the agriculture of Central Oregon to visitors and locals who may not be aware how many food producers are in the region, Nichols said.

"Central Oregon has this vibrant food scene that I think a lot of people, especially in Western Oregon, are not quite aware of," Nichols said. "We have this really cool scene out here that we are trying to highlight and pack-age in a more exciting manner."

Jeff Fox owns Sun Life Farm outside of Prineville, one of four Crook County farms on the food trail.

Fox bought the 160-acre farm two years ago. He grows 7,000 lavender plants on the property. His farm also features 5 miles of hiking trails and an area with 19 beehives where he produces honey.

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