

OUR VIEW

# What is the real cost of public records?

Ninety million dollars. It's a lot of money. It's the number Adam Crawford, external relations director for the state's Department of Administrative Services, used last week about the cost of public records. He said that's what he thought Oregon might be spending to give media organizations and others public records at reduced cost or free.

"I think the number may be even higher," Crawford replied, when he was challenged on it by another member of the Oregon Public Records Advisory Council. The discussion then quickly shifted away.

If it really is \$90 million or more, it's a mighty sum that Crawford pointed out the state is transferring, in part, to for-profit companies.

But when we later asked him about that number, it seemed an educated guess. He didn't make it clear where it came from. He did mention a survey of state agencies from 2018. It said agencies fulfilled roughly 25,000 public records requests and charged under \$150,000 for doing that, waiving all other staff and legal costs.

Would that add up to \$90 million? Maybe. Maybe not.

If Crawford believes that number is right, though, and he's a member of the executive team of a key state agency, journalists and the public should not be surprised when they face enormous fees when they ask for public records. Government officials may believe they are simply giving away too much at the cost of other state priorities.

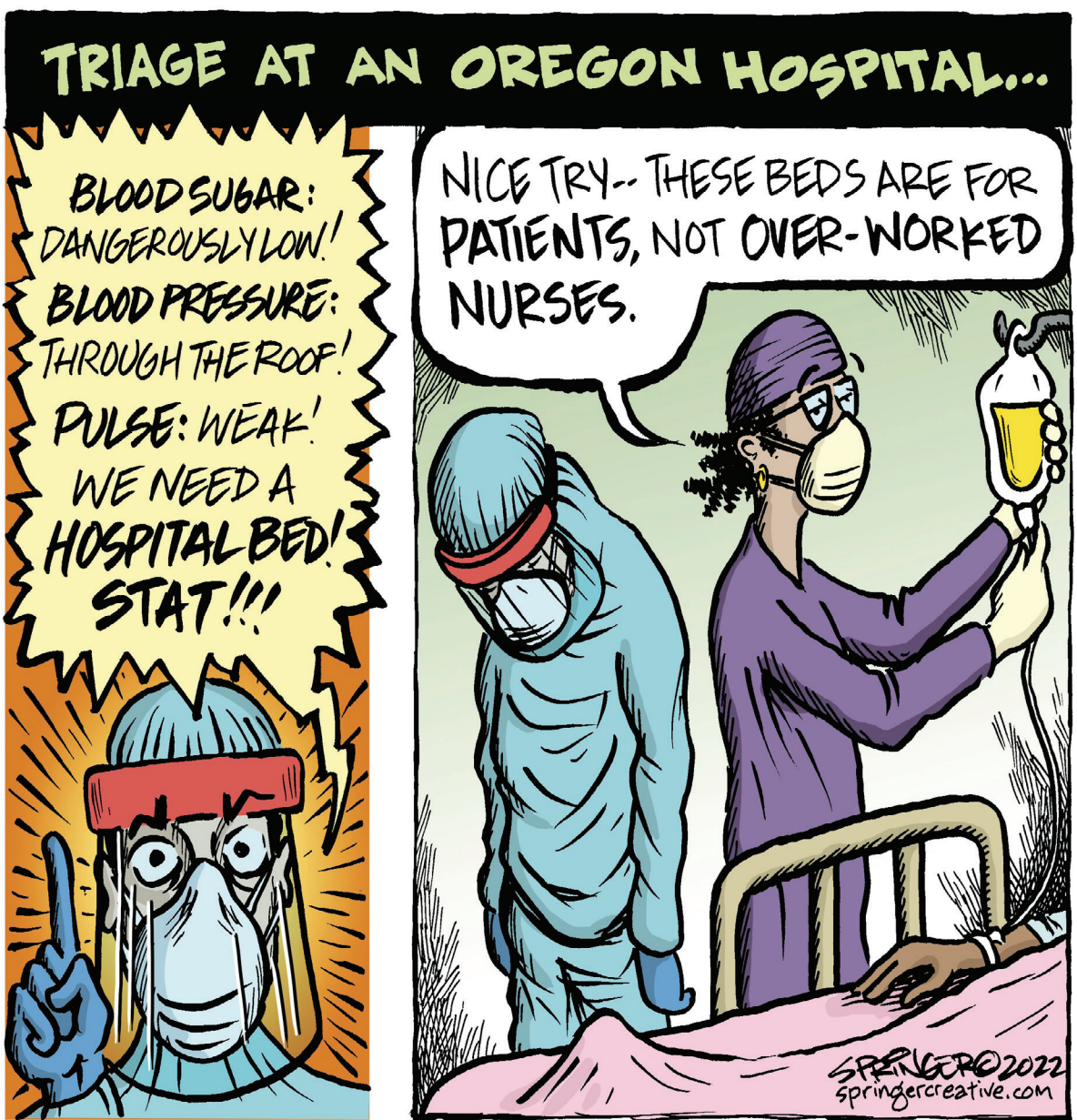
Public agencies can charge reasonable fees for public records in Oregon. They don't have to. They can waive some or all of the cost. Charging high fees can be the same as denying a request. What should be charged and who should pay it is at the heart of the questions the state committee, the Oregon Public Records Advisory Council, is looking at, as Crawford said.

For government bodies, releasing public records isn't just a matter of doing a computer search, the computer spits out the records and then the government can hand them over in minutes. State and local government agencies don't always have the most modern computers. The state is in the process of upgrading many outdated systems. The old systems weren't designed to make public records searches easy.

There can also be a problem with how information is stored. Releasable information can be stored mixed in with personal information that should not be disclosed. Scouring records and redacting personal information takes time and effort. Who should pay for that?

And there can be issues when people take on new roles volunteering to serve on government committees. They can end up using their personal email accounts when they email about government business. Those particular emails would be public records. That would mean the volunteers would have to compile them and hand them over if requested. If some of the emails didn't show them in the best light, would they?

What is the solution? That's what Oregon's Public Records Advisory Council is working on. Real numbers should be the foundation of the discussion.



OFF THE BEATEN PATH

## Perils and pleasures of sourdough

When the temperature drops, snow and ice cover the landscape, and the wind howls, there is something I'm partial to doing — along with leaving faucets dripping, opening cupboard doors below sinks, hauling in another load of firewood — and that's baking bread.

My first bread baking attempts met with great success — if one wanted to turn out construction-grade cement blocks.

An elderly friend offered me a recipe with drawings to accompany the instructions — the recipe old enough that the drawings showed baking the bread in a wood cookstove. Success! Less flour and more kneading. Even with baking in an electric oven, bread turned out edible. Most of the time. Well, some of the time. I needed more practice.

My bread-baking goal: Bake all of the bread products our family would eat for the year, which meant baking bread about four or five times a week. I'd often whip up a homemade soup to accompany our noontime bread. We had an increase of friends who just happened to drop by at lunchtime.

The children supported my efforts — they fashioned mini-loaves, kneading with fingers, fists and sometimes elbows.

When the year was up, I realized there were two aspects to bread baking — the chemistry and the artistic execution. I didn't do too badly with the chemistry part. As for artistic endeavor, not so much. The tops of loaves looked like potato storage sheds with wind damage.

Next project — sourdough. I first heard about sourdough from my parents. In the late



Jean Ann Moultrie

1930s, they each traveled to Fairbanks, Alaska, for an adventure where they met each other and married. In my childhood, they related tales of trappers and

gold prospectors with their sourdough starts kept warm by the woodstove. My Alaskan sourdough start did not come from my parents.

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, my parents, concerned the Japanese might bomb Alaska, packed and left. No time for sourdough starts.

Years later, a friend asked if I'd like an authentic Alaskan sourdough start. She noted her husband had been in Alaska before they married and he brought back a start.

"My husband is so careful to keep the start alive," my friend said, "he brought it with us on our honeymoon."

My sourdough journey began in earnest.

I discovered San Francisco sourdough breads possessed a distinctive flavor, a sharpness. My Alaskan sourdough start gave breads a rich yet mild flavor, and a nice texture without the sharpness.

I kept my sourdough start fed. (One cup of flour, one cup of warm water.)

In time, I got distracted feeding family, houseplants, animals, etc. and neglected feeding my sourdough. I went on vacation and didn't take it with me. The start died into a puddle of off-colored liquid.

Years later in Oregon, I pur-

chased Oregon pioneer sourdough. This sourdough contained Oregon hops and had a rich yet mild flavor and texture. I used it in breads, rolls, cookies, pancakes, and pizza dough.

To keep this start going, I conscientiously fed it. I never discarded the part not needed until I ended up with two gallons of sourdough.

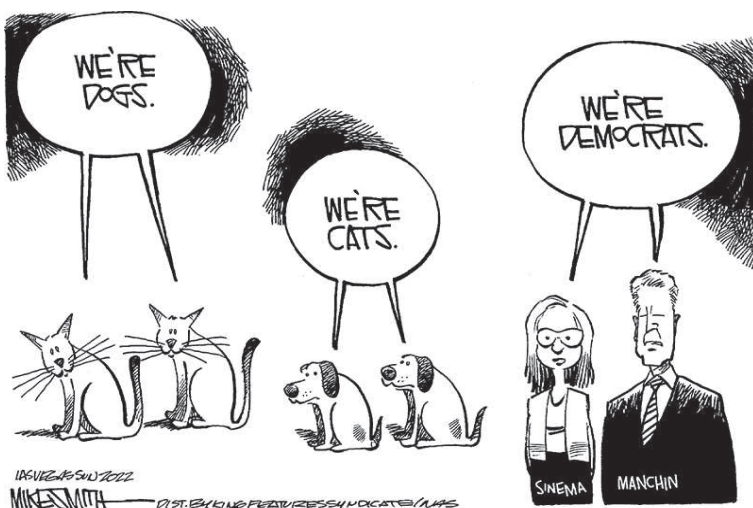
Still, I couldn't waste any. Normally, only a cup or two is needed for a recipe. I sloshed the two gallons into a tub-sized bowl, added a bag of flour, salt, sweetener, oil, and stirred. Kneading the dough felt like a two-hour session lifting barbells at a gym. The taste and texture turned out so sharp I could have grabbed a loaf, hauled it out to the woodpile chopping block, and used the loaf to split kindling.

I started again with a cup of refreshed sourdough along with a pinch of yeast, and flour enough to make a slurry. The solution turned bubbly and fragrant. The family, distracted by a visiting bookmobile, forgot to check on it. Later, I found the sourdough had escaped the bowl, flowed across the counter, oozed into the silverware drawer, and looked as though it was trying to escape out the back door.

Friends suggested this scene had the makings of a horror flick titled "The Sourdough That Ate Grant County."

Lately, no one has stopped by for soup and bread.

*Jean Ann Moultrie is a Grant County writer. Her next culinary adventure: discover the ultimate biscuit recipe, as in biscuits and gravy. The freshened sourdough, buttermilk, and flour are measured and ready ...*



### WHERE TO WRITE

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 • **Grant County Courthouse** — 201 S. Humbolt St., Suite 280, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-575-0059. 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.  
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 • **John Day** — 450 E. Main St, John Day, 97845. Phone: 541-575-0028. Fax: 541-575-1721. Email: cityjd@centurytel.net.  
 • **Long Creek** — P.O. Box 489, Long Creek 97856. Phone: 541-421-3601. Fax: 541-421-3075. Email: info@cityoflongcreek.com.  
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 • **Mt. Vernon** — P.O. Box 647, Mt. Vernon 97865. Phone: 541-932-4688. Fax: 541-932-4222. Email: cmtv@ortelco.net.  
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 • **Seneca** — P.O. Box 208, Seneca 97873.
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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, oregonlegislature.gov.  
 • **Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale** — 900 Court St. NE, S-301, Salem 97301. Phone: 503-986-1730. Website: oregonlegislature.gov/findley. Email: sen.lynnfindley@oregonlegislature.gov.  
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### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Feeling grateful for public health workers

**To the Editor:**  
 I think it's time to take a moment to give a shout-out to Grant County Public Health for the

amazing job they've been doing the last couple years.

Administrator Kimberly Lindsay and her entire crew have worked hard through this pandemic to get us the vaccines in a timely and organized manner. Despite shortages and unpredictable supplies (especially at the

beginning) and logistical challenges, they have risen to the occasion.

COVID is a moving target. We are lucky to have Grant County Public Health and the many other health care providers in our area.

**Richard Bray**  
 Kimberly

**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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