

OUR VIEW

Government works best when it works in the open

Our May 25 edition carried a story about corrective action taken with five members of the Grant School Board for using part of an executive session last summer to talk about matters that should have been discussed in open session. While Oregon law allows public bodies like school boards to go into executive session — where the general public is excluded and journalists are directed not to report on the proceedings — there are strict limits on when they can do so.

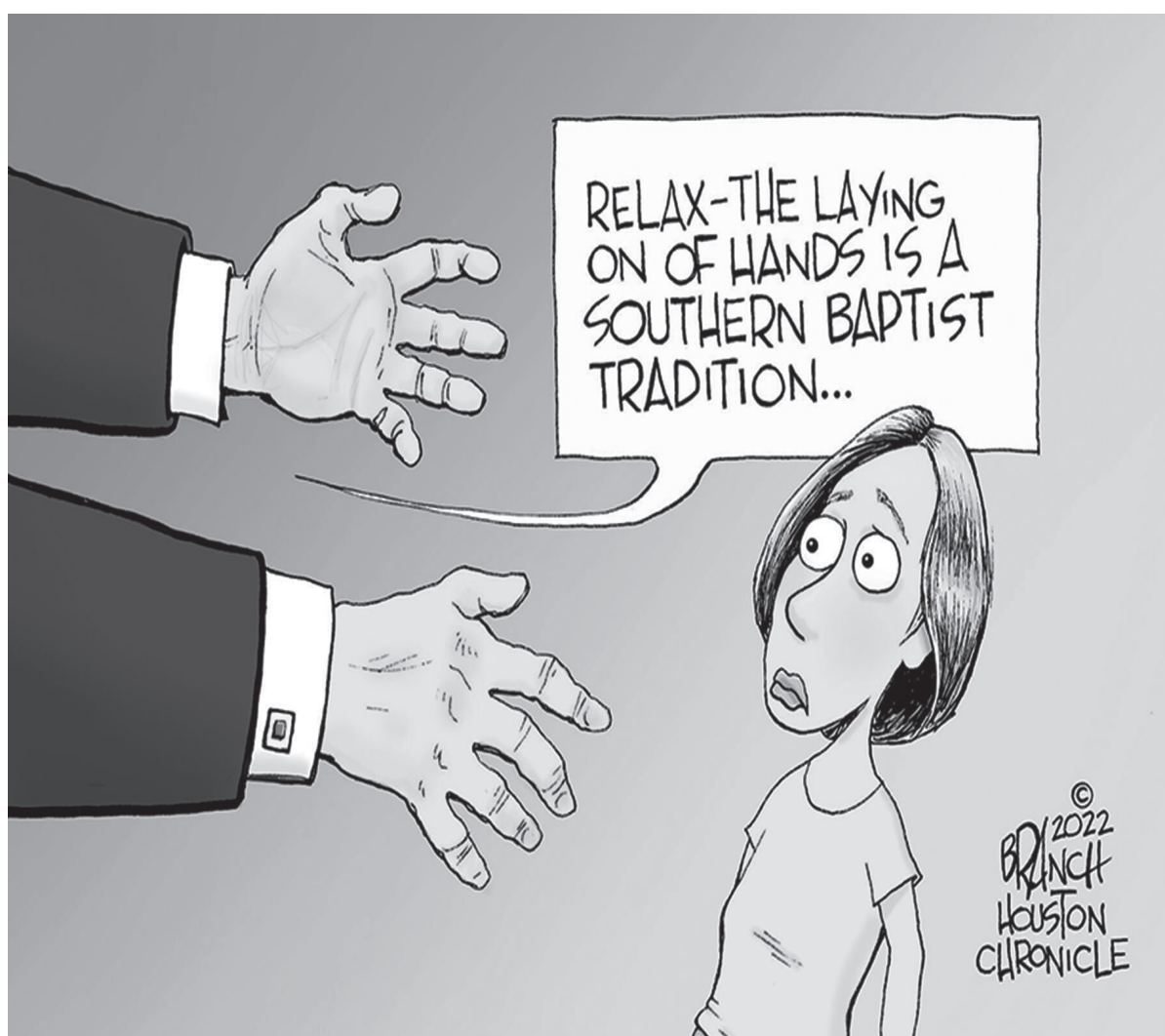
The public has the strongest possible interest in having access to the deliberations of elected officials, and it is a fundamental part of our mission as a newspaper to notify our readers when we believe those officials are improperly operating out of the public eye. In this case, the Eagle took the unusual step of filing a complaint with the Oregon Government Ethics Commission in order to get a definitive ruling on whether the board members violated the law. The commission determined that they had done so and voted to send each member who took part in the session a letter of education.

The steps taken by the ethics commission — part of a negotiated settlement agreement with the board members — address the problem not through punishment but through education on the law. We think that is an appropriate response.

To be clear, we don't believe any of the school board members acted maliciously in this instance. Yes, as elected officials, they should be aware of the laws that govern executive sessions and take care to abide by those laws. But we also recognize that it can be easy for those discussions to veer off-track, especially when the public body doesn't have an attorney in the room to remind them of exactly where the legal boundaries are.

And we have nothing but respect for anyone who is willing to serve their community by sitting on the local school board — even more so in such emotionally fraught and politically charged times as these. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, school boards across the country have become focal points for discontent over burdensome public health measures aimed at slowing the spread of the disease. In many cases, school board members have become the targets of anger and vitriol over decisions made at the state or federal level over which they have no control.

So while we take a measure of satisfaction in knowing that the Grant School Board will be more careful in the future not to stray beyond the limits of Oregon's open meetings law, we also offer our sincere appreciation to the school board members for their continued willingness to do a difficult job in the most trying of circumstances. We should all be grateful for their service.



FARMER'S FATE

We interrupt this program ...

The light from my husband's headlamp swung straight into my eyes. I blinked hard, shaking my head. "You're supposed to blind her—not me," I hissed. He nodded silently, his light bouncing up and down on the barn walls. I knelt down, opening the box of baby chicks. They chirped loudly while they tumbled into the corner trying to hide. I gently scooped one up, then nodded for my husband to lift up Grandma Hen.

Grandma Hen was a Barred Rock chicken with what looked like extra-fluffy pantaloons and carried herself in a matronly fashion. She had found herself a straw-filled hidey-hole in the barn to nest. Unfortunately, she had been there four weeks. I was going to move her off the day before, but she looked so determined that I decided we'd pick up a couple chicks in town. We have surrogated babies under sleepy momma hens in the middle of the night several times, and tonight was no different.

My husband reached down to lift up Grandma Hen — which started a kerfuffle, the size of which I'd never seen from a chicken at midnight. She screeched and pecked, fluffing up her neck, twisting about angrily trying to snap her attacker. Her pecks landed solidly on my husband's wrist, drawing blood. He dropped her before I had fully withdrawn my hand from depositing a baby chick on her nest of eggs.

"What is wrong with her?" I asked, questioning if we should even try to put in the rest of the chicks.

We kept watching her. She wasn't accepting the new baby, but she wasn't attacking it, either.

"Let's try once more," my husband suggested.

We split the one pair of gloves we had brought, and he pulled his



Brianna Walker

sleeves down to protect as much skin as possible. She let out a blood-curdling squawk as she was unceremoniously lifted into the air — and a baby chick fell out of her wings.

I sat back in surprise. No wonder she was creating such a ruckus. The little yellow baby scurried into the corner, peeping. I quickly pushed in the remaining new babies and my husband happily dropped her back onto nest.

At first the new babies were afraid of this large, still disgruntled creature looming over them, and they tried to peck their way farther into the corner, but after a few minutes the heat she exuded seemed to be too great of a temptation, and one by one they all squeezed their way under her.

We watched a bit longer before making a run for the house in the downpour. We were drenched by the time we shut the kitchen door. Cold, wet, and still slightly worried about Grandma Hen and her new babies, I wasn't quite ready to go back to bed.

"Why don't we finish watching that movie," my husband suggested. We changed into dry pajamas, made cups of hot cocoa and snuggled up on the couch for a middle-of-the-night movie.

"With the house quiet, the kids and puppies asleep, and us watching a movie, drinking cocoa, after just giving orphan babies a new mom — we are practically living a Hallmark movie," my husband said as I snuggled into his arms.

I was still thinking about the chicks when my husband announced, "That's how they're gonna get together! The guy he gave the book to in the beginning is going

to bring them together."

I love Hallmark movies — but they are terribly predictable. One can nearly always tell within minutes of the opening who is going to end up with whom. This time was no different, although I hadn't yet made the connection of how it was going to happen.

"Everything happens for a reason," he continued. "People don't show up without a purpose."

I raised an eyebrow. "Never?" I asked, remembering a rather pointless altercation he'd had recently with a most disagreeable person.

"Everything happens for a reason in a Hallmark movie," he emphasized.

"But I thought you said we are basically living a Hallmark movie?" I asked saccharinely, making a show of taking a long sip of hot cocoa.

He paused, then, just as I swallowed, said, "Those people are the interrupting commercials!"

After the cocoa had warmed my nose, I snuggled back and felt my heart pulse with a heat that warmed my soul. I had a husband who would get up in the middle of a thunderstorm to deliver baby chicks (that we didn't need) to a broody hen (who pecked him), get wet and cold, and still think of our lives as a Hallmark movie.

This winter has had its share of bumps, but I loved my husband's idea of commercials. No matter how annoying, pesky or untimely people and situations may be, they are just small interruptions — they don't affect our love story at all. Wishing you all a Hallmark love story whose commercials interrupt just long enough to refill your popcorn bowls.

Brianna Walker is a Grant County resident who occasionally writes about the Farmer's Fate for the Blue Mountain Eagle.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Time to mend the Second Amendment

To the Editor:

I'm a gun person. I got my first rifle when I was 9 years old. As a teenager, I owned nearly 20 firearms. I didn't think of any of them as weapons; they were all for hunting, muzzleloader shooting, or hanging on the wall as antiques.

As strange as it sounds, I've never been able to give approval to the National Rifle Association's approach to gun ownership. It's always been obvious to me that certain people have no business in possessing a firearm. The prob-

lem is that we don't have the ability to see into a person's mind to know their intentions. So, up to now, I've been against all forms of gun control.

The heinous murder of 19 beautiful children and their teachers has totally horrified me. The fact that I've been to Uvalde during past years doing nature photography in Texas makes these killings very real to me. There have been other mass shootings that were very upsetting, but with this latest one, I am convinced that it is time to outlaw all rapid-fire, high-capacity weapons from public ownership.

Now, I can hear objections from advocates of the 2nd Amendment:

"What about my rights?" In reply, what about the rights of children to go to school without fearing for their lives? What about their rights to expect to be able to go home to their families? What about their parents' and brothers' and sisters' rights to go forward in life without nightmares of their loss?

Your rights pale in comparison to these babies' right to life. The Second Amendment was written as an amendment for the times they were living in. Perhaps it's time for another amendment for the current times we are living (and dying) in.

Terry Steele Ritter

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 two letters per person per month. Deadline is 5 p.m. Friday. Send letters by email to editor@bmeagle.com; by mail to Blue Mountain Eagle, 195 N. Canyon Blvd., John Day, OR 97845; or by fax to 541-575-1244.

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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.
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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, 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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