



HH FILE PHOTO

Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, listens during the 2015 legislative session on House of Representatives floor in Salem.

Got a problem? Talk to Greg. Or Greg. Or was it Mr. Smith?

A quick guide to answering your government questions

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

Greg is a lovely name, but it causes a lot of confusion for the good people of Umatilla County.

Sometimes state Rep. Greg Smith's staff fields complaints about votes that U.S. Rep. Greg Walden made, or a citizen asks Greg Smith for help only to be reminded they are represented by his neighboring-district colleague Rep. Greg Barreto. Other times Greg Walden gets the blame in the Facebook comments on an article about something Greg Smith did.

Since newspapers usually refer to people by their last name, this does not cause me as much difficulty in my reporting as keeping track of the preponderance of Smiths, particularly when quoting Hermiston city manager Byron Smith and Hermiston city councilor Doug Smith from the same meeting (on a side note, this seems to suggest that Greg Smith's parents get credit for coming up with the ultimate Hermiston politician name).

But even if the Gregs and the Smiths were to all change their names to things like Herbert Nithercott and Sherlock Portendorfer, there will always be confusion on behalf of some citizens about who to call when they have a problem with government. The fact is, government is just plain confusing.



HH FILE PHOTO

The Hermiston City Council listens to the testimony during a meeting at city hall in April 2017 in Hermiston.

I've covered various levels of government in the six years I've worked as a journalist, and even I still call the wrong agency for information sometimes. But there are a few general rules of thumb:

- If the issue with roads, code enforcement, law enforcement, water/sewer or parks happens inside city limits, call city hall.

- If it happened inside Umatilla County but outside of city limits, or if it involves things like public health or the courts, call the county courthouse.

- If it happened on a state highway or interstate, or involves state regulations, call or email your state representative or state senator.

- If it falls under a federal agency like the Veterans Administration, or it's an issue that Congress is voting on such as the Affordable Care Act, call or email your congressperson or senator's office.

- If you're a little unsure about which category your problem falls under, Google, the news media and government websites can help you out, but if not, take your best guess and the

person on the other end will almost always be willing to refer you to the right place.

Another underutilized option is to take your complaint directly to an entire city council or county commission via the public comment section of meetings. Hermiston's city council meets on the second and fourth Monday of each month, and there is always time for comments on both non-agenda and agenda items. Last week Santa Claus stopped by to wish councilors a Merry Christmas and a self-proclaimed "concerned citizen or whatever" asked the council to consider putting more signs up to let semi trucks know that Main Street is no longer a truck route through town.

Once a man even testified that the Hermiston Butte was really a giant person who would rise up to defend us when aliens invaded Hermiston someday. It was certainly one of the more memorable government meetings I've covered, but even if your concerns are a little more run-of-the mill, don't let that stop you from getting involved.

LETTERS

Hermiston makes a great impression

Originally sent to Mayor Dave Drotzmann and Hermiston High School principal Tom Spoo:

I visited Hermiston a week ago because my son is now a football coach at La Salle High School and they were playing Hermiston High School in the first round of the 5A state playoffs. I really wanted to acknowledge that even though we lost, I had a very enjoyable time in Hermiston and it truly was because of the kindness of people of Hermiston and the students and the school's treatment of the visiting team.

From the hotel staff (I stayed at the Holiday Inn Express) to the various retailers I visited to the stadium volunteers to everyone — what a tremendous group of people.

I coached my sons in various sports and even coached at La Salle for a short time while my oldest played there. The sportsmanship and respect displayed by the home team and their fans was a great thing to watch, particularly since we see examples of how not to do that on an almost weekly basis.

In Hermiston (what a beautiful setting for football), I headed to the top row of the visitors section. I was by myself for some time, then suddenly it seemed like 30-plus middle-schoolers (maybe freshman) were all around me. I figured that was their section and avoidance of older kids. Coming from where I live, my first thought was "Great, this might not be fun" surrounded by so many early teens.

I stayed up there for the first half, and in all that time I never heard one cuss word, I was spoken to a few times and addressed as "sir." While the kids were definite teens they were polite and respectful. Big difference from the big city — I can tell you.

I later had dinner with my son and he told me how nice the school's staff and volunteers were and how wonderful they treated the La Salle coaches and players. The dinner prepared and served was an incredible touch.

So, this is just my thank you and appreciation for being the town and people you are. In this crazy world we live, you demonstrate the right way to do things.

Good luck this week! I'm rooting for you.

Dennis Kelly
Tigard

Water district candidate thanks voters

To all Westland Water District patrons who turned out to vote on Tuesday, Nov. 14 to fill a position on its Board of Directors:

Voting is a privilege we have in our country and something we have only begun in this district. So to those of you who took the time to vote, thank you for being involved.

My wife and I have lived in Hermiston now for 12 years, moving here to be closer to family, enjoy quieter surroundings and become a part of this lovely community through

our church and other local involvement. For the past couple of years I have taken an interest in the Westland Water District and where it is headed.

For this reason, when asked, I chose to run for an open position in District Four. With a considerably high voting turnout Tuesday, 202 patrons dedicated their time to vote. Mr. Bellinger received 107 to my 95. I was pleased with the turnout; it was so close.

For the next few years ahead of us, I hope that Mr. Bellinger will take

his position seriously for all concerned patrons, no matter the size of their usage or status in our community. I wish him the best in his continued service to the district. I will continue to keep an active interest in our water district and hope many others will find the time to attend the open meetings.

Again, a big thank you to everyone who took the time to vote for me and to those who helped me in this endeavor.

Ray Vogt
Hermiston

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