

# OPINION

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: CITY DESK@DAILYCHRONICLE.COM

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## OUR OPINION

## Lawmakers should have addressed water-well measure

**A** Chronicle report published Feb. 23 outlined a troubling issue that could soon come to a head. While farmers and ranchers have long been required to own a legal right to any water they use in our largely arid state, individual homes can be granted an exemption from the water-right rule for a well that provides household water.

That exemption has held fast, even for large subdivisions that can consume as much water as a commercial farm. As development accelerates, increasing numbers of household wells could start drawing down the groundwater table, causing wells to dry, as has already been the case in some parts of the West.

Over the years, state regulators and lawmakers have attempted to create more restrictions on the drilling of household wells, but lobbyists for real estate developers, builders and well drillers have successfully stymied those efforts. Now the issue is likely headed to court where a lawsuit was filed by long-time water rights holders to force the state to revise its water-use regulations.

The lawsuit was placed on hold in 2010 when litigants agreed to a settlement that required the state to rewrite the rules by the end of last year. Two legislatures have met since then. A water-well measure passed by lawmakers last year was vetoed by Gov. Steve Bullock, who wanted the law to be more restrictive. And the new court-ordered water-well regulations proposed last fall by the state Department of Natural Resources and Conservation have been scrapped in an intra-governmental dispute with the legislative Environmental Quality Council.

Water issues aside, this is a case study in political gridlock. When our elected leaders and the special interests they are beholden to become so entrenched in their positions they cannot reach a compromise, the courts become the recourse of last resort.

Lawmakers and the governor could have hammered out an agreement that would have protected some of the interests of the development lobbyists and agricultural water right holders. But in today's all-or-nothing world of consuming self-interest, compromise seems to have become a dirty word.

Now, the issue may be finally headed to the courts. And it's unlikely that anybody with a stake in this issue is going to like what that judge rules. But

## Senators support CMS overpayment

Listen up taxpayers! The Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) received letters from 40 senators urging the continued over-payment to private insurers of Medicare Advantage plans in 2015. What most people don't know is that for years private insurers of Medicare Advantage plans have been overpaid millions of taxpayer dollars. The same services received under traditional Medicare are provided at much less cost to the taxpayer, while exorbitant insurance profits land in the pockets of private insurers who offer Medicare Advantage (MA). By comparison, private insurer MA costs are higher than for comparable patients in traditional Medicare coverage.

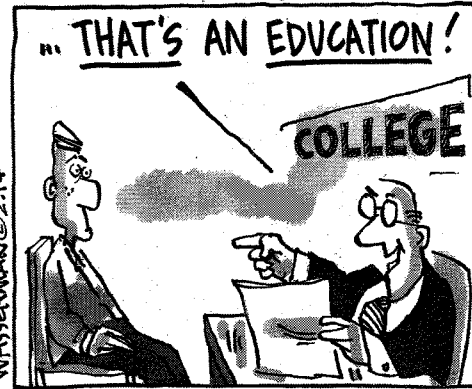
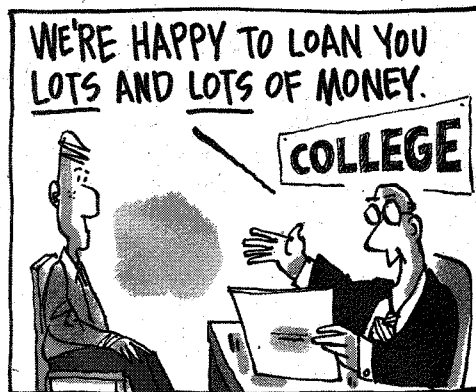
Why should you care? You should care because it is your tax funds being given to private health insurance companies, paying them more than it costs to provide care in the traditional Medicare program. If the enrollment in these plans expands, it opens the door to converting Medicare into a premium support (voucher) program for a market of private insurance plans. The insurance lobbyists are working toward under-funding Medicare as it exists, hoping it fades into nonexistence. As the value of a voucher program is then allowed to diminish, more health care costs would be shifted to subscribers.

The public should realize the intentions of AHIP, the powerful lobby group in back of promoting Medicare Advantage over-payments. If the 40 senators really cared about Medicare beneficiaries, they would stop the over payment to Medicare Advantage insurers, and pass legislation to increase coverage of those under traditional Medicare to protect them from the financial duress of out-of-pocket costs.

Instead of paying more to private Medicare Advantage plans, CMS should move those over-payments to the traditional Medicare program to reduce financial hardship, rather than giving them to private insurers for profit and their deceptive advertising in Medicare Advantage plans.

Richard A. Damon, MD  
 Bozeman

## LETTERS



## Gourley letters aim to mislead readers

Bruce Gourley pops up repeatedly in the Chronicle's letters section to lecture us that America wasn't founded as a Christian nation. Thus his Feb. 20 contribution that, instead, lectured us about the putative Republican origins of the Affordable Care Act [ACA] was quite the surprise.

As Gourley interprets things, despite their having originated central features of the ACA two decades ago, Republicans now oppose the law because of their "hatred of President Obama."

Republican senators did introduce two healthcare bills in November 1993, and both included mandates that individuals buy insurance, as does the ACA. But Oklahoma Sen. Don Nickles, primary sponsor of one bill, explained in a letter to the New York Times (Feb. 26, 2012) that, soon after the introduction, he had the mandate removed from his bill: "Having thought through the arguments, we decided ... that government should not compel people to buy health insurance. The suggestion that Republicans dropped support for the mandate only after President Obama proposed it is categorically false."

And neither bill survived in the Democratic-run Senate.

Gourley also writes that the ACA "is weaning America off our old socialized healthcare model of taxpayers footing the bills for working-age persons unable to afford healthcare." Well who does he think will be footing the massive subsidies to low-income people that are integral to the ACA? Pixies?

So Gourley has broadened the range of subjects about which he spreads misinformation, which suggests that, even though he's a Baptist, Gourley's confusion may be catholic! (That's catholic with a small "c.")

Stanley Racine  
 Bozeman

## Voters: be skeptical of campaign ads

Thanks to the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the Citizens United case and their overturning Montana's campaign finance laws, there is nothing that Montana residents can do to stop money from pouring into the state to pay for campaign advertising. It has already started with ads appearing on television and popping up on computers. Although I find most of these ads nauseating, they apparently work even though (or because?) they attack personalities rather than issues and even though their information is often inaccurate or out of context.

Since we can't stop the

money and the ads they lead to, what can we do? I caution voters to be very wary of all campaign advertising. The people who are paying for it often have no interest in the welfare of Montana or Montanans. Like most of us they are using their money to buy what they want for themselves. I doubt if they are trying to help us. I have recently seen ads paid for by Americans for Prosperity, an organization heavily subsidized by the billionaire Koch brothers, and ads paid for by a national senatorial campaign committee of which the primary interest seems to be the politics of Utah and Nevada.

This letter is addressed to both editors of the Chronicle and its readers. Readers, please choose your voting information from sources that are independent, objective and not primarily self-serving. Editors and reporters of the Bozeman Daily Chronicle, please give us objective, relevant and accurate information about the candidates and the issues. Check the statements that candidates and their representatives feed you. Also I encourage you to investigate and report on the sources of money that are funding campaigns so that voters can make informed decisions about the validity and motivation behind these ads which inundate and annoy us.

Stephen Guggenheim  
 Bozeman

## Book clubs: You are what you read

I've transformed from the kid with her nose in a book into an adult who would gladly accept a job where I'm paid to read. While I've not achieved that vocational goal, I've managed to find the next best thing: the Book Club. Over the years, I've been in a few. And in my experience, they all have a distinct personality.

When The Boys were little, my quest

your BFFs to gab about books while enjoying wine and cake.

There must always be cake.

But apparently that wasn't good enough in New York City. Accord-



each other's company and perhaps a glass of Chardonnay.

The Ladies of the Book Club heartily welcomed me and made me feel like a Writing Rock Star. "We feel like we know you," one of the Ladies told me. As we transitioned to the living room, each of the Ladies had a cake plate balanced on one knee and my book on the other.

to have the outcome, we hope not to hear those tired old complaints about “judicial activism” and “legislating from the bench.”

The court will be doing its job — which just happens to be the job that our elected leaders in Helena were supposed to do.

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to join a Book Club had as much to do with having a multisyllabic conversation with grown-ups as reading something other than “One Fish, Two Fish” 20 times in a row. But one group I hoped to join was a little too uptight. They grilled me like the admissions committee at Harvard. “What’s the last book you read?” one of the stone-faced members asked me.

Apparently “Goodnight Moon” was not the correct answer.

While most clubs serve sustenance, some choose a food-themed book. Books like “The Sweetness of the Bottom of the Pie,” “The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake,” or “Like Water for Chocolate” would make my short list. A new trend incorporates food in a different way: the Cookbook Book Club where members nosh on recipes from its pages.

So not only are you what you eat, in this club, you are what you read.

But the recipe for a terrific book club is simple. It involves a few key ingredients besides a great read each month. It should be a fun way to hangout with

ing to the New York Times, Big Apple book clubs have the author make a special appearance.

New York, you are so not the trendsetter. A Bozeman book club did that last month. It’s true; I was there. Not as a club member. I was the author.

That’s right, they were reading *my* book.

The email arrived with “Book Club — Guest of Honor,” in the subject line. It contained phrases like, “we chose your book” and “we’d love for you to attend the meeting.” It said there’d be wine and cake.

Well count me in.

When I arrived that night, I broke into a flop sweat like I was at an IRS audit. What if they were expecting Tina Fey? What if the last words I heard were, “WHO picked this book anyway?”

When the hostess opened the door and I surveyed the room, I knew I could stop hyperventilating. This was a friendly group of BFFs who enjoyed



## DENISE MALLOY

Local columnist

And they had questions. Lots of questions.

But the thing everyone wanted to know, “Are your stories true?”

Absolutely. Except anything about The Husband. Everything I write about him is complete fiction. At least that’s what He says.

One of the Book Club Ladies leaned over and asked, “Are you going to write about this?”

Definitely. But, worry not, Ladies. I never reveal my sources.

However, my favorite question came as we were wrapping up the evening. One of the Ladies said, “Why don’t you join us?”

Ladies of the Book Club, I am honored to be welcomed into your tribe of book lovers. You are my people. I promise you two things: Your secrets will always be safe with me. And next time, I’ll bring the cake.

*Denise Malloy will always be fond of “Goodnight Moon.” She can be reached at [dmalloy@bresnan.net](mailto:dmalloy@bresnan.net) or at [www.denisemalloy.com](http://www.denisemalloy.com).*