

The logo features a grey silhouette of the state of Washington to the left of the text. The text "Washington Coalition for Open Government" is in a serif font, with "Washington" in a smaller size than "Coalition for Open Government". Below the main text, the website address "washingtoncog.org" is written in a smaller, lowercase, sans-serif font.

Washington Coalition for Open Government

washingtoncog.org

Seattle---The Washington Coalition for Open Government has taken the extraordinary step of voting to honor an out-of-state newspaper embroiled in a recent victory for transparency. The Malheur Enterprise in Malheur, Oregon will be presented a Key Award from WCOG for the editor's tenacity and persistence in procuring public records.

Malheur Enterprise Editor, Les Zaitz, will accept the award on behalf of the newspaper which was sued by a state agency for requesting public records relating to a psychiatric patient who subsequent to his release, killed three people.

"Our Key Awards are given throughout the year to individuals or organizations who fight secrecy and work to make government open and transparent. We are a statewide organization and so the award is designed for and almost always given to people or organizations in Washington State. But our board felt this case was so extraordinary because the newspaper was sued by a state agency for simply requesting information the public had a right to know. The board wanted to draw attention to this egregious case and honor the newspaper for standing up to secrecy." said WCOG Communications Consultant, Juli Bunting.

WCOG became aware of the issue following coverage in The Seattle Times by columnist Danny Westneat, who said the case underscores the difficulties small newspapers have when asking for records that may be controversial.

"The tiny weekly was sued by a state agency. Not because the paper did anything wrong, but because it's pursuing public records in a horrific murder case of intense interest in the town. The government wants to shield the records, and make the paper pay its court costs and any "additional relief as this court deems just and proper....."

"This is sadly becoming common, which is why I'm highlighting it. With the press weakening, it's as if governments both big and small can smell blood in the water. Small papers especially have almost no resources to take on cases like this (though I think here they've poked the wrong small-town newspaper editor)."

In Oregon, requestors can appeal to the State Attorney General to overrule an agency that denies records and order the records released. The Attorney General

sided with the newspaper and ordered those records released and that's when the agency sued the newspaper.

The newspaper was eventually successful and the records were released. WCOG is proud to honor the Malheur Enterprise and Editor Les Zaitz with a Key Award.