

Content of three email messages sent by me, Brian Hines, to Statesman Journal staff regarding factual errors in both a draft and published editorial by Dick Hughes, editorial page editor. The subject of the editorial was the proposed Pringle Square development on Salem's riverfront.

I repeatedly pointed out factual errors in the editorial and requested that either Hughes present information showing he actually was correct, or issue a correction to the errors in the editorial. My final email requested that the newspaper conduct an inquiry into whether Hughes violated the Gannett Code of Ethics. I never got a response to that email.

*(1) First email sent September 3, 2013 to Statesman Journal editorial board (salemed@statesmanjournal.com), Dick Hughes, Michael Davis, Michael Rose. **Emphasis added in boldface.***

-----  
Statesman Journal staff, you know that I am a frequent critic of your newspaper. I do this because I have been a subscriber for 36 years, and I care a lot about the newspaper -- including its role in what you like to call the "public square" of Salem.

**The draft editorial about Pringle Square has sent me into a deeper level of despair about the Statesman Journal than I thought was possible.** I realize the editorial probably is set in stone now. I no longer see a request for comments.

I printed out the earlier draft. **I also printed out the comments that I and others left on it. These, in part, corrected factual errors in that draft. Disturbingly, those errors are still in what I assume is the final draft. This, after I sent you emails around noon today confirming that what I said earlier was true: the Pringle Square access plan lauded in the editorial does indeed require National Park Service approval that will take a long time, one to two years. Public access to the development is not guaranteed until that process is completed. Or until an alternative access route, such as a new RR crossing, is established.**

**I am open to being corrected. But I see nothing in the editorial that indicates the Statesman Journal is in possession of any facts that contradict the comment that I just left on the piece.** You will note that I speak quite harshly in the last paragraph. If you can show me that this editorial is indeed based on solid facts which contradict my understanding, I will be pleased to take back those words.

Until then, I stand by them.

**The SJ has a responsibility to its readers and the citizenry at large to present the truth about public policy issues. When you knowingly publish stories or editorials that contain serious untruths, and refuse to address them when people point them out to you, I consider this journalistic malpractice.** SJ staff are free to consider it whatever you want. Here's my comment on the editorial. I invite the "gang" opposed to the Carousel parking lot takeover who I've cc'd to submit your own comments on the editorial when it is published, likely tomorrow.

-- Brian

-----  
Dick, there are so many factual errors in this editorial, it's hard to know where to start. Here's a beginning:

**(1) It isn't that approval by the National Park Service "might" be necessary. It WILL be necessary. The City staff report says this. Today I talked with the person who administers the federal LCWF program at the state level. She says it is necessary. I told you this in email messages. How do you justify your claim that it "might" be necessary?**

(2) Related to (1). If government gives the go-ahead, as you say, meaning the City of Salem, construction cannot start soon. I have emailed SJ staff and City officials about this. The above-mentioned state staff person says it takes an average of two years to review a 6(f) application to convert Riverfront Park from a public recreational use to a private use. It will take at least one year.

(3) The railroad memo was not really from the "Oregon Department of Transportation." It was from one person in the Rail Division who, to my understanding, does not even directly handle applications for new railroad crossings. I have talked with the person who does. He told me that nothing in state law or rule requires the closing of one crossing if another one is approved.

It will take much longer and perhaps be even more expensive for the City to go through the federal National Park Service 6(f) conversion application than for the City to apply to the state for a new RR crossing on Pringle Square property. The only way to know this is to apply for a RR crossing. Nothing prevents the City from doing this. So there is no reason to move ahead with a takeover of part of Riverfront Park.

**Allow me to be blunt. An editorial needs to be based on facts. This editorial is not based on facts. It is close to, if not beyond, the dividing line that separates responsible from irresponsible journalism. You say things in this editorial that are factually untrue, and that people (including me) have told you are factually untrue. You present no evidence why what you say is true, and what I say is untrue.**

If this editorial is published as is, it will be another sign that the Statesman journal is not only sinking into journalistic mediocrity, it has reached that unenviable level.

-----  
Brian Hines

*(2) Second email sent September 4, 2013 to Statesman Journal editorial board (salemed@statesmanjournal.com), Dick Hughes, Michael Davis, Michael Rose. **Emphasis added in boldface.** This email was sent after the unfactual editorial appeared in the print newspaper.*

-----

Smack down! Let's do it! Show me what you've got! Fact-wise. Get in the truth ring and let's fight it out, Dick Hughes, and the rest of the editorial board who bought off on the untruths in today's Pringle Square editorial.

**I say: That editorial is based on some seriously false conclusions. Not just minor falsities, but untruths which call into question the entire premise of the editorial.**

**Does the Statesman Journal care about truth-telling? Are you committed to upholding journalistic standards of accuracy and issuing corrections when a reader catches your newspaper in untruths?**

We'll soon find out.

**Via my two comments on the editorial I have issued a challenge to Dick Hughes to show that what I claim is true, really isn't. Hey, Hughes could be right and I could be wrong.** Anything is impossible in this cosmos of infinite possibilities.

I await your response to what I have said below. So do the many people in Salem who are concerned about accurate information being conveyed to the public about the proposed conversion of part of Riverfront Park from a public recreational use (which the City agreed to "in perpetuity") to a private use -- an access road to the development.

**The Statesman Journal's credibility is at stake here. We all make mistakes. We all make errors. We all say things that aren't true. Responsible journalists say, "I should have known better. Thanks for pointing out my mistake, my error, what I said that wasn't true." Are you responsible journalists?**

Here's the challenge, in the form of a comment exchange between me and Dick Hughes:

-----

Brian Hines says:

**There are serious factual errors in this editorial by Dick Hughes. Highly disappointing. Almost (or actually) a form of journalistic malpractice, because I and others pointed out the same errors in a draft editorial put online days ago. Has the Statesman Journal given up on holding to usual journalistic standards of fact-checking?**

Here are some of the blatant untruths from Hughes:

**(1) It isn't that approval by the National Park Service "might" be necessary. It WILL be necessary. The City staff report says this. Yesterday I talked with the person who administers the federal Land and Water Conservation fund program at the state level, Michele Scalise. She says it is necessary. I told the SJ this in**

**email messages. How does the SJ justify its claim that it "might" be necessary? Scalise said the application review process will take one to two years, probably two. Or even more.**

(2) Related to (1) and the lack of access through Riverfront Park for two years or so: If the City of Salem gives the go-ahead to starting the process of converting part of the Riverfront Park Carousel parking lot to a private Pringle Square access road, **construction cannot start soon.** At least, not by using the parking lot, and not with guaranteed public access to the Pringle Square property. What developer would take the risk of doing this, and what bank would give them a construction loan? A competent developer finds a way to gain access to property before buying it and getting design approvals, not after.

(3) The railroad memo cited in the editorial was not really from the "Oregon Department of Transportation." It was from one person in the Rail Division who, to my understanding, does not even directly handle applications for new railroad crossings. I have talked with the person who does. He told me that nothing in state law or rule requires the closing of one crossing if another one is approved.

It will take much longer and likely be even more expensive for the City to go through the federal National Park Service 6(f) conversion application process than for the City to apply to the state for a new RR crossing on Pringle Square property. The only way to know this is to apply for a RR crossing. Nothing prevents the City from doing this. So there is no reason to move ahead with a takeover of part of Riverfront Park.

**Allow me to be blunt. An editorial needs to be based on facts. This editorial is not based on facts. It is close to, if not beyond, the dividing line that separates responsible from irresponsible journalism. The SJ says things in this editorial that are factually untrue, and that people (including me) have told the newspaper are factually untrue. The editorial presents no evidence that what Hughes says is true, and that the alternate demonstrable facts stated in this comment are untrue.**

As a long time subscriber, I expect that the Statesman Journal will publish a prominent correction to this editorial before next Monday's City Council meeting. An apology to its readers and a promise to do a much better job at fact-checking editorials also should be made by Dick Hughes, the editorial page editor.

Lastly, I'll note that contrary to what this editorial says, handing over to a private developer part of a public park built with federal funds and dedicated to public recreational use "in perpetuity" (forever) is decidedly unusual. It is not at all like a typical private-public partnership. The City staff report notes this. The National Park Service engages in such an extensive 1-2 year review process for such proposed conversions of public land because it is rare that no alternatives exist for a private use such as access to Pringle Square. Several alternatives do exist in this case.

-----  
**Then Dick Hughes says:**

**Disagree on factual errors. You have a different opinion than we do of what can and should happen. That's fine. But those are not factual errors.**

-----  
**And Brian Hines issues a challenge:**

**Wrong. There are facts, and there are opinions. These are different. Your opinions in this editorial are based largely on false facts. You need to admit this, or prove that the facts below are wrong. Which of these six facts do you disagree with? Give me a "true" or "false" for each statement. I say each is "true." Any you think are "false" we can have a factual discussion about.**

(1) The City must apply to the state Parks and Recreation Department and the National Park Service for a LCWF 6 (f) conversion before any portion of Riverfront Park can be used for a purpose other than public recreation.

(2) The 6 (f) conversion will be handled as a regular application because this is a controversial request which demands a full environmental impact study and public comment period.

(3) The 6 (f) conversion application process will take 1 to 2 years, or more, during which time the Pringle Square developers will be unable to use any portion of Riverfront Park for access to the development.

(4) Given the above, for one to two years the Pringle Square developers will have no better access to their property than they do now, should the City Council say "yes" to moving forward with a conversion of the Carousel parking lot to a private access road.

(5) Nothing prevents the City from applying for a new public railroad crossing on Pringle Square property.

(6) Nothing in state law or rule requires that an existing railroad crossing, such as the one at State Street, be closed if a new railroad crossing is opened.

**Again, I say that all of these six statements are true. I can give reasons/evidence for this. Can you, Dick Hughes, say that any of these six statements are false? If so, give reasons/evidence for this.**

**Otherwise, please proceed with the correction notice and apology to SJ readers that I have requested as a subscriber. I pay money for my subscription because, in part, I want true information about what is happening in Salem. Your editorial contains false information.**

**I am calling you out on this. I will not give up on demanding that you give a "true" or "false" answer to each of the six statements above. Your editorial opinion in this piece was based on falsities.**

**As a journalist, you should be concerned about truth. If you aren't, you should consider resigning your position. (Watch the most recent episode of "Newsroom" on HBO for how genuine, albeit fictional, journalists take truth-telling seriously.)**

-----  
-- Brian Hines

*(3) Third email sent September 4, 2013 to Statesman Journal editorial board (salemed@statesmanjournal.com), Dick Hughes, Michael Davis, Michael Rose. **Emphasis added in boldface.** This email was sent after Dick Hughes told me that he stood by the editorial.*

I have received a quick response from Dick Hughes to my previous message about factual errors in today's Pringle Square editorial.

“The Statesman Journal respectfully declines to get involved in email wars. We stand by our editorials. Or we wouldn't research and write them in the first place.  
Dick Hughes”

This completely unsatisfying response causes me, as a Statesman Journal subscriber, to formally request that the newspaper conduct an inquiry into violations of the Gannett Code of Ethics by Dick Hughes. I believe this is the Code of Ethics. If there is a more recent version, please point me to it.

[http://sabew.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Code\\_of\\_Ethics\\_for\\_Gannett\\_Newspaper\\_Division.pdf](http://sabew.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Code_of_Ethics_for_Gannett_Newspaper_Division.pdf)

I reserve the right to add on to the Ethics principles which Dick Hughes' refusal to correct factual errors in his editorial violates. These are some which struck me as significant:

**GANNETT NEWSPAPER DIVISION  
I. PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL CONDUCT FOR NEWSROOMS**

...We will hold factual information in opinion columns and editorials to the same standards of accuracy as news stories.

...We will correct errors promptly.

...We will not intentionally slant the news.

...Consider these questions: “How do you know? How can you be sure? Where is the evidence? Who is the source? How does he or she know? What is the supporting documentation?”

...Errors should be corrected promptly. But first, a determination must be made that the fact indeed was in error and that the correction itself is fully accurate.

...Errors should be corrected with sufficient prominence that readers who saw the original error are likely to see the correction. This is a matter of the editor's judgment.

...Errors should be corrected whether or not they are called to the attention of the newspaper by someone outside the newsroom.

...Factual errors should be corrected in most cases even if the subject of the error does not want it to be corrected. The rationale for this is rooted in the Truth Principle. It is the newspaper's duty to provide accurate information to readers. An exception may be made – at the behest of the subject – when the correction of a relatively minor mistake would result in public ridicule or greater harm than the original error.

...Newsroom staffers should be receptive to complaints about inaccuracies and follow up on them.

...Newsroom staffers have a responsibility to alert the appropriate editor if they become aware of a possible error in the newspaper.

**As a long-time subscriber (36 years), I find it exceedingly disturbing that the Statesman Journal has now become so uncaring of accuracy in its news stories and editorials. I have been told by the Editorial Page Editor that he is utterly uninterested in correcting significant factual errors in his editorial.**

I should point out that Dick Hughes put a draft version of his editorial on his blog on August 31, asking for comments on it. What purpose is there in doing this if Hughes doesn't care about having factual errors pointed out to him? **I and others left comments about factual errors in his piece which were ignored by Hughes.**

This episode raises broader questions about the credibility of Statesman Journal reporting and news coverage. Is everyone at the newspaper so dismissive of having errors pointed out, or is it just Dick Hughes? I look forward to an explanation.

**And I still await a response to the "true" or "false" question about the six Pringle Square-related facts listed in my previous message. Again, if the Statesman Journal persists in denying these facts on its editorial pages, why should readers trust that news stories about Pringle Square will be factual?**

-- Brian Hines