

OUR VIEW

Smarten up state spending

When people spend other people's money, they can be less than finicky. And so it seems with workers at the state of Oregon.

For instance, the state bought 23 Xerox printers for \$1,461.78. A state audit found a better deal that could have saved the state more than half that amount.

The state bought 58 copies of some statistical software for \$12,694.42. A state audit found a better deal that could have saved \$6,079.52.

And the state bought four licenses for some database software for \$119,649.11. The same state audit from December 2018 found a better deal that could have saved the state \$107,017.51.

Yikes.

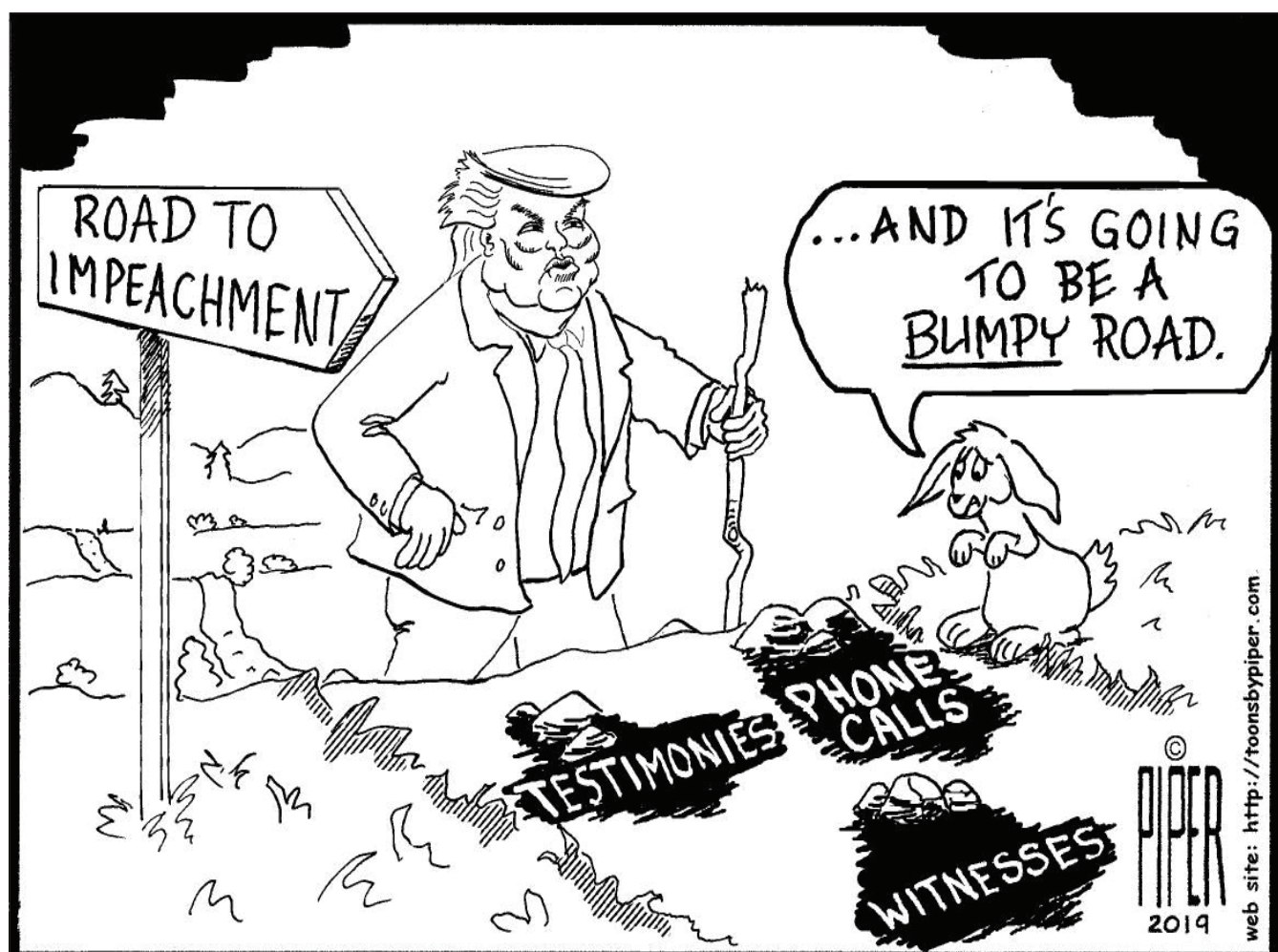
Those are egregious examples. We did pick them from the audit to highlight the shocking savings that the state could have made if it spent money more carefully. Of course, state workers may not always have the time to seek out a great deal on every purchase, and state purchasing requirements can interfere with getting the cheapest price. The state audit found, though, the state could have saved between \$400 million and \$1.6 billion during the 2015-17 biennium based on \$8 billion in procurements during that time.

We'd like to be able to tell you that's all fixed now. We can't. But we can tell you the state is moving in what could be a positive direction in one area — purchases by state and local governments that are too big to put on a credit card.

The state has a contract with Periscope Holdings, an Austin, Texas, company, to build a new statewide procurement system, according to *Governing* magazine. The platform called OregonBuys Marketplace is scheduled to gradually go live across government in 2020. There are similar systems in Illinois, New Jersey and Massachusetts. If it works right, it will replace what's called ORPIN, which is the system the state and local governments use now.

Buying stuff for the state gets complicated, because there are many legal requirements. The hope is that the system will keep that in the background and government workers will be able to shop for goods more easily. It will automate a lot of the work. It might make it easier for smaller vendors to compete for state dollars. And the state should be able to better track spending and purchases and manage that data.

Will the cost of the OregonBuys be recouped in savings? We hope so. Will it fix the fundamental problem that people aren't as careful when they spend other people's money? No. But it should enable the state and the public to better monitor it.



MY VOICE

Walden will be missed by corporate funders, not constituents

The Observer Oct. 30 "Our View" editorial, "Walden will be missed," misses the mark. While Rep. Walden will be missed by his corporate funders, he will not be missed by the more than 100,000 residents of Congressional District 2 who would have lost their health care had Walden's attempts to destroy the Affordable Care Act succeeded.

Union County Progressives have long urged Mr. Walden to retire. We even held a retirement party for him at his La Grande office nearly two years ago. We are pleased that he has accepted our recommendation.

We will not, however, forget that Walden was the architect of the American Health Care Act, which came to be known in CD 2 as Walden-NoCare. Walden chaired the Energy and Commerce Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives designing a system that would have devastated his Eastern Oregon district, leading to the potential closure of rural hospitals, the loss of health coverage for nearly 100,000 of his constituents and the loss of thousands of health-care-related jobs, according to estimates based on a Congressional Budget Office March 2017 report. At town halls we asked, "Mr. Walden, why are you willing to destroy the health care of thousands of your constituents? Do you have a heart?"

It is unsurprising that Walden supported the interests of health insurance companies and Big Pharma over those of his working and middle-class constituents. The Oct. 22, 2017, Lund

About the author

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Team. Bill can be contacted at bill@oregonrural.org. My Voice columns should be 500-700 words. Submissions

should include a portrait-type photograph of the author. Authors also should include their full name, age, occupation and relevant organizational memberships. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those published elsewhere.

Send columns to La Grande Observer, 1406 Fifth St., La Grande 97850, fax them to 541-963-7804 or email them to news@lagrandeobserver.com.

Report, "Walden a Top Recipient in Millions Funneled by Pharma to Lawmakers," citing Kaiser Health News, showed Walden receiving contributions from drug-making corporate PACs totaling \$269,800 since January 2017 and \$851,042 since 2007.

Who was Greg working for? Every year, pharmaceutical company political action committees (PACs) contribute millions of dollars to U.S. senators and representatives in a multipronged effort to influence health care lawmaking

and spending priorities. Pharma money flows to congressional committees with jurisdiction over pharmaceutical issues like drug pricing and FDA approval.

Walden watched his coffers swell with drug-maker PAC money when he became chairman of the powerful House Committee on Energy and Commerce in early 2017. With six months to go in the 2018 cycle, Walden had already raised an additional \$71,000 over the 2016 cycle — or 11 times more than drug-makers gave him a decade previously.

While PAC contributions to candidates are limited to \$5,000 per primary or general election, a larger donation frequently accompanies individual contributions from the company's executives and other employees. It also sends a clear message to the recipient, campaign finance experts say, one they may remember when lobbyists come calling: There's more where that came from.

Pharmaceutical companies also wield their political power in ways veiled from the public, giving to "dark money" groups and super PACs — independent groups barred from directly donating to or coordinating with campaigns — bent on swaying lawmaking. Given the drug-makers' money flowing into Walden's coffers, it is unsurprising that he consistently voted against efforts to control prescription costs.

Unfortunately, Greg Walden has worked for his corporate sponsors — not for his Eastern Oregon constituents.

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