

My Voice

Root out conflicts of interest to restore faith in the Legislature

Recently introduced Senate Bill 865 and it has generated some controversy. The bill is about rooting out conflicts of interest in our government, but I wanted to provide my constituents with what I hope is helpful background.

One fundamental American ideal is checks and balances. Oregon's government, which is elected and governed by The People, must not only protect the



SEN. BILL HANSELL
DISTRICT 29

rights of Oregonians, but must also have their trust. In regards to trust, our representa-

tive democracy needs all the help it can get. Polling shows that faith in our government is at an all-time low.

Principles of checks and balances are intended to root out conflicts of interest in our elected officials. In the words of James Madison, the author of the American Constitution, "ambition must be made to counteract ambition."

One way the Oregon Constitution seeks to counteract ambition is by prohibiting elected officials from holding multiple offices at one time. According to Article 3 Section 1 of Oregon's Constitution, as a state senator, I cannot also serve as a county commissioner at the same time, nor can the governor serve as the attorney general, and judges cannot be state representatives. The goal of this is to ensure that different people are carrying out different parts of our government. If one person was controlling all aspects of our government, we would call that tyranny.

However, the Constitution is silent on whether elected leaders can also lead their political party as elected officers. While currently legal, the same ethical and practical concerns apply. Political parties are tasked with fundraising to help their candidates get elected. Yet, elected statewide leaders make policy that directly influences elections, campaign finance, and even the structure of the political parties themselves. If political party leaders are also elected to public office, they can too easily change the rules of the game to benefit themselves. That's called corruption, and one of my goals as a Republican official is to ensure that the Republican Party avoids all appearances of corruption.

There has long been an understanding that there should be a separation between the "People's Work," which we are sent to Salem to do as elected officials, and political party politics. That is why we, for example, cannot use taxpayer dollars for our campaigns.

As a lawmaker, one of my primary responsibilities is to ensure that my constituents trust their government. I want every Oregonian, regardless of political ideology, to have faith that conflicts of interest do not have the final say on the laws that govern them. Without that fundamental trust, we do not have a government by, for, and of The People.

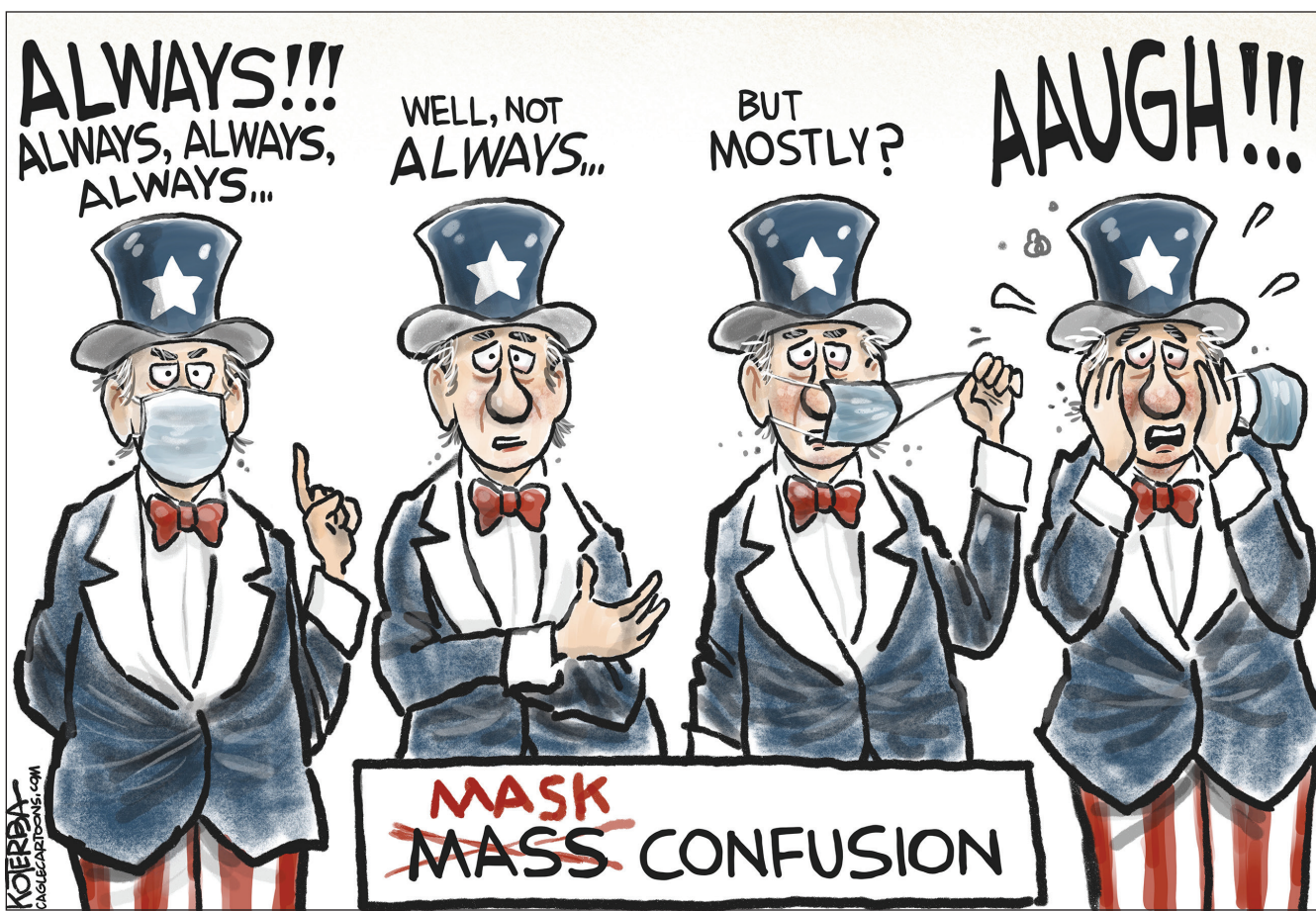
This is why I introduced Senate Bill 865. The law would prohibit an elected official to state office (governor, secretary of state, state legislators, etc.) from simultaneously being an elected officer on a political party's state central committee. This bill would codify neutral standards of transparency and accountability.

I have been contacted by several of my constituents who are concerned about potential conflicts of interest among the current Oregon Republican Party leadership. Let me be clear: This bill is not about individuals. It's about establishing clear ethical boundaries to which all political parties can agree.

I can only imagine the rightful outrage from my Republican constituents if Gov. Kate Brown controlled both the state government and the flow of millions of campaign dollars as chair of the Democrat Party central committee. That would be a clear problem. While we are nowhere near that point yet, we needn't wait for such obvious abuse of power.

As your senator, I feel a deep responsibility to make our government as transparent and accountable to "We The People" as possible. That sometimes means doing something that some in my own party won't like, but that doesn't mean it isn't the right thing to do.

State Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, represents Wallowa, Union, Umatilla, Morrow, Gilliam, Sherman, and parts of Wasco counties.



Letters

Consider the consequences and vote 'Greater I-da-no'

As we contemplate the Greater Idaho move, I would like to bring up a few consequences such an action may bring.

First is the serious pay cut some of our most hardworking citizens will take with such a move. If one earns minimum wage in Oregon, their pay could potentially decrease by \$4.25 an hour from \$11.50 down to \$7.25, or a reduction of \$8,840 per year for full-time minimum wage workers. Way more than the income tax reduction the change might produce. It is common that such workers tend to be renters, so a reduction in property tax would unlikely benefit them. In addition, the move to Idaho would also mean an additional 6% sales tax on their already reduced income.

Second is the cost to implement such a shift of borders. A quick review of past speed limit changes for a variety of states reveals such changes cost anywhere from \$75 to \$135 per sign. What would be the cost to change even more signs should we choose to join Idaho? Oregon highway signs that would need to change to Idaho, signs for cities, businesses, schools, telephone numbers, addresses, driver licenses, voter registration, etc. Who would pay for such changes?

But in the end what are we asking? Do we want our government to spend needless hours on this issue instead of on more immediate problems that affect us all, like droughts and wildfire mitigation? One could just move to Idaho without the complications.

*Jason Yielding
La Grande*

Reelect Randy Shaw to La Grande School Board

I'm supporting Randy Shaw for Position 4 on the La Grande School Board.

I've known Randy Shaw for many years. He's a straight-up honest man. Randy is approachable and open to suggestions. You won't leave wondering what his position is.

Randy graduated from the La Grande school system, and so will his children.

Randy has been on the board for about four years now. He's part of the reason La Grande's graduation rate is 89.4%. He views declining enrollment as temporary and says, "I honestly think the majority will return." A positive outlook from a positive man.

I know personally Randy is involved in kids' athletics, hauling his children and other local kids to one event or another all over the place on weekends for years.

Write to us

The Observer welcomes letters to the editor. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We will not publish consumer complaints against businesses, personal attacks against private individuals or comments that can incite violence. We also discourage thank-you letters.

Letters should be no longer than 350 words and must be signed and carry the author's name, address and phone number (for verification only). We will not publish anonymous letters.

Letter writers are limited to one letter every two weeks.

Longer community comment

Eastern Oregon is unique and requires knowledge of the area and community to address its needs. Randy Shaw has the experience and knowledge of the La Grande school system and cares what is happening in our district.

Remember that old adage: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Keep Randy Shaw in Position 4 on the La Grande School Board.

*Michael A. Gove
La Grande*

No need for border disorder; let's stay in Eastern Oregon

Upon crossing into Idaho on I-84 there used to be a sign reading "Idaho is too great to litter." I used to joke the sign should read: "Idaho is too illiterate to be great." The joke hit home, however, when a Greater Idaho leaflet landed in my mail, claiming that I'd be better off if I was an Idahoan; it would be effortless, I wouldn't have to move, they would simply elasticize Idaho's boundary and stretch it around Oregon's more desirable acreage. That done, I'd supposedly be happy with lacking infrastructure. For example, why waste good tax money filling in those unattended potholes?

No, I live in Eastern Oregon and hopefully will continue to do so. Besides, I wouldn't be caught dead driving around with license plates that champion "Famous Potatoes." It's true Eastern Oregon is often overlooked by Salem and we have to apologize for Portland's behavior — but that's no reason to surround us by Idaho.

There are alternatives. If I want the Idaho experience I can always move to Douglas or Josephine counties and watch old episodes of "Duck Dynasty." Or, why not physically move Idaho? Ship it to the Middle East; plunk it down right between

columns, such as My Voice, must be no more than 700 words. Writers must provide a recent headshot and a one-sentence biography. Like letters to the editor, columns must refrain from complaints against businesses or personal attacks against private individuals. Submissions must carry the author's name, address and phone number.

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the two other "I" countries, Iran and Iraq. It would at least give mask-less Ammon Bundy something to whine about. Meanwhile, I'm happy living here with Eastern Oregon's present borders, values and laws. Or maybe I'll create a new movement. I'll call it: Greater Hawaii.

*Whit Deschner
Baker City*

La Grande School District needs to be transparent

Critical race theory and transgenderism are two destructive ideologies that have taken root in American society. Critical race theory is a new spin on the old Karl Marx tune of oppressors and the oppressed. Transgenderism casts aside common sense and basic human biology. Both are poison for our nation, and public schools are often the gateway. And the Oregon Department of Education is 100% on board with promoting both of these poisonous ideologies. Take a look at the ODE K-12 standards for health education from 2018 and those proposed for social studies in 2021 on the ODE website.

We should be aware of what teachers are teaching students. But unless you go to the teacher and specifically ask to see instructional materials, you can't. You would think curriculum materials (textbook titles, articles, PowerPoints, etc.) would be posted online, but they are not.

The La Grande School District needs to be transparent in how critical race theory and transgenderism have been incorporated (or not) in the curriculum, and post the instructional materials used. Then parents and others can make informed decisions on whether they want students to receive an education or indoctrination.

*Stephen Boe
La Grande*

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