

OUR VIEW

Brown deal leaves bad aftertaste

It is not a political scandal by any means, but the recent news Gov. Kate Brown spent a large chunk of taxpayer dollars to pay one of her former advisers to serve as a political consultant leaves a bitter aftertaste.

The news last week barely broke above the collective consciousness of the state and it certainly gained little traction in portions of the Willamette Valley, a traditional base for the governor.

At its heart the news revolves around a deal brokered in 2020 where the governor hired her former communications director Chris Pair through a no-bid state contract. The deal provides Pair with a salary of \$6,500 a month to attend weekly meetings of the Western Governors' Association regarding enlarging the effort to create infrastructure for electric vehicles. So far, the state has paid Pair \$91,000.

Brown has also paid Pair money through one of her political action committees.

When Pair — a longtime member of Brown's staff — departed in January 2020, Brown made no mention he might be hired back. A month later, the governor's office asked state officials to prepare the no-bid contract for Pair's consulting company.

Now, on the face of it, none of this is illegal. In fact, former government officials turning around to work as independent contractors for their former bosses or agencies is commonplace. It just looks bad.

Transparency in government is essential for a democracy to function properly. That means taxpayers have the right to know what their elected leaders are doing and why.

The money paid out to Pair so far is, obviously, just a drop in the bucket of the multibillion-dollar budget of the state. But it is the principle that counts in this situation. If the governor was going to hire one of her former staffers and let him or her be paid with tax dollars, she should have disclosed it. State government — and especially the governor's office — isn't a private company. It's funded by taxpayers, and taxpayers have a right to know — no matter how low the sum — how their money is being used.

The governor didn't break the law, but bank-rolling one of her former staffers on the taxpayers' dime doesn't sit well with us.



LETTERS

River Democracy Act shows 'vision and determination'

Northeast Oregon connects the Rocky Mountains to the Blue Mountains, the Cascades and Coast Range beyond. Its waterways provide a habitat connectivity corridor of continental importance. Flowing from some of Oregon's tallest peaks into deep river canyons, including Hells Canyon — North America's deepest — these waterways flow through deserts and wet forests rivaling the rain forests of the coast.

Ours is truly a landscape of superlatives.

Currently, only 2% of Oregon's 110,000 miles of rivers are protected under the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. That is why I was thrilled to read about Sen. Wyden's call for nominations ("Nominate your favorite waterway for Wild and Scenic Act protection," The Observer, Dec. 16, 2019): "Whether you are a white-water rafter, an angler or simply an Oregonian who believes strongly in protecting the river or stream that provides safe drinking water to your community, I want to hear from you."

Thousands of Oregonians from every county in our state answered that call by submitting more than 15,000 nominations of waterways to be included in the legislation.

Congress passed the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in 1968 to protect our nation's best free-flowing rivers, to ensure clean drinking water, to safeguard fisheries, and preserve cultural resources, scenery and outdoor recreation opportunities for all future generations. Our Northeast Oregon waterways do indeed provide many distinctive wildlife habitats, clean water and recreation opportunities that make our region so unique. I applaud the senator's vision and determination.

Brock Evans
La Grande

Nature is still our greatest asset

Union and Willowa counties' opposition to the Rivers Democracy Act was predictable given their records over the years. They opposed Rails to Trails and historically oppose any natural resource protection.

Yet, they take offense at not being invited to the planning stages? Would an ex be invited to plan a new wedding?

I recall a Rails to Trails meeting where Steve McClure, a long-time county commissioner, said, "I'd hate to tell my grandchildren I'd had our tracks removed." With foresight he could now be crediting himself for helping create Union Willowa Rails to Trails.

Logging, ranching, railroading and farming sustained our past. Those employment options are all in steady decline in North-eastern Oregon. Forests, decimated by intensive logging, may never recover. Ranchers facing invasive weeds, overgrazed summer pastures and disappearing water sources struggle to turn a profit. Trucks and cars drastically reduced rail transportation. Farmers drill deeper and deeper wells as the water table rapidly falls. So young would-be loggers, ranchers, railroaders and farmers must find other employment here or leave. Nature, as degraded as it has become, is still our greatest asset.

This month I again vacationed with friends along Idaho's Rails to Trails. Towns built around coal mining and trains were about abandoned before their tracks were pulled and replaced by a trail. Now it's a bustling area once again with fully booked motels and license plates from across the country. Urban vacationers of all ages pedal scenic rural trails and patronize local businesses.

Things change. We need leaders who accept change and envision new and vibrant futures.

There are far better places to build industrial parks. But few places other than national and state parks rival our natural beauty. That fact should guide us into the future.

Mary McCracken
Island City

Saddened by small-town rigidity

A week ago our horse Beau dra week ago our horse, Beau, dropped dead in the 1/2-acre field behind our house after a brief illness. A friend came over and buried him there.

Then the Union city manager drove up to say someone turned us in for burying our horse within city limits, which is against city ordinance. Our choice was to go before

a judge and be fined a hefty sum, Or dig him up, winch him into a trailer and take him to the Baker landfill. So we dug him up, winched him onto our flatbed and he was on his way to the dump the same day.

A neighbor had called city hall and turned us in. I have not stopped crying over this. This has been a cruel wake-up call regarding small-town rigidity. Our neighbors are not close by, no utilities in our field, no close water.

It's just sad.

Jane Wentzel
Union

Take an honest look at the For the People Act

Wow, great pretzel logic. Let's be honest here. The For the People Act isn't for the people. It is for the Democratic Party — period. This is bill HR1, which will allow anyone to vote in our elections without showing any form of ID. to show that they are American and they have the right to vote here in this nation.

Teresa Smith-Dixon's letter in the July 13 Observer makes it sound like you are anti-American if you don't vote for it when in fact just the opposite is true. Is it not the American way to have honest and fair elections? The election of 2020 showed what happens when the rules are changed: Anyone from anywhere in the world can and did come in and vote.

Now as far as Jim Crow goes, just look at the beginnings of the Democratic Party and you will see where it came from. Our Joe Biden in 1974 voted to keep from busing black students into his area to keep it white. Joe Biden in 1994 helped to pass the crime law that put many Black people in jail.

Joe Biden has now at only six months in office allowed hundreds of thousands of illegals from all parts of the world to come here to vote in our upcoming elections without any ID to prove who they are. This is the true intent of the bill HR1.

If you read Teresa Smith-Dixon's letter and listen to Joe Biden on TV, you will see that they both say the same thing, almost word for word. If you take just a few minutes and see if what I have written here is true, you will know the truth.

J.R. Kauffman
La Grande

EDITORIALS

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of The Observer editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of The Observer.

LETTERS

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 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. Submission does not guarantee publication, which is at the discretion of the editor.

SEND LETTERS TO:

letters@lagrandeobserver.com or via mail to Editor, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE

NEWSSTAND PRICE: \$1.50
You can save up to 55% off the single-copy price with home delivery.
Call 800-781-3214 to subscribe.

Subscription rates:

Monthly Autopay\$10.75
13 weeks.....\$37.00
26 weeks.....\$71.00
52 weeks.....\$135.00

THE OBSERVER

An independent newspaper founded in 1896

www.lagrandeobserver.com

Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, Oregon 97801
Published Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (except postal holidays) by EO Media Group, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)

The Observer retains ownership and copyright protection of all staff-prepared news copy, advertising copy, photos and news or ad illustrations. They may not be reproduced without explicit prior approval.

COPYRIGHT © 2021

Phone: 541-963-3161

Toll free (Oregon): 1-800-781-3214

Email: news@lagrandeobserver.com

POSTMASTER Send address changes to: The Observer, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850

STAFF

Regional publisher.....	Karrine Brogotti	Multimedia journalist.....	Alex Wittwer
Regional circulation director.....	Kelli Craft	Home delivery advisor.....	Amanda Fredrick
Interim editor.....	Andrew Cutler	Advertising representative.....	Juli Bloodgood
News clerk.....	Lisa Lester Kelly	Advertising representative.....	Amy Horn
Reporter.....	Dick Mason	National accounts coordinator.....	Devi Mathson
Reporter.....	Davis Carbaugh	Graphic design.....	Dorothy Kautz
Intern.....	Carlos Fuentes		

