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Pragmatism needed, not religious rigidity

Bruce Buckmaster is a good choice for Fish and Wildlife

One of the less apparent shortcomings of the third John Kitzhaber administration was the vacancy of the Northwest Oregon seat on the Fish and Wildlife Commission. It sat empty for more than two years. Gov. Kate Brown ended that last week with the appointment of Bruce Buckmaster of Astoria.

Gubernatorial appointments to state boards and commissions aren't the genteel affairs they were in the era of governors Mark Hatfield and Tom McCall. Senate confirmation puts these volunteers into a spotlight. And appointments to some commissions, notably Fish and Wildlife, have become contentious because of the issues that board confronts.

Some resource choices are akin to religious issues. That is, partisans on either side are reluctant to compromise.

That describes the virtue of Buckmaster's appointment. As the former co-owner of Bio-Oregon, he became acquainted with all aspects of the fish resource of the Columbia River. He knows this is a complex system, not given to simple answers. While some in the sports fishing industry have labeled Buckmaster as the enemy, alleging that he will side with the gillnet fishing community, it's important to note that he is a passionate sports fisherman himself. And he's been a hard-headed businessman who's had to make choices.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission deals with more than lower Columbia salmon, but that is one of its largest pieces of unfinished business. Late in his re-election campaign, Gov. Kitzhaber responded to evidence that the seine

net fishing he had prescribed for commercial fishermen was not resulting in less impact on nonhatchery salmon than the gillnets they are intended to replace. Killing fewer naturally spawning salmon not only speeds recovery of endangered runs, but also extends sport and commercial seasons that are abruptly ended when a set number of "wild" salmon are estimated to have been inadvertently killed.

Kitzhaber said he was open to "adaptive management," which in this case conceivably might mean acknowledging that carefully designed gillnet seasons are not the "walls of death" opponents portray them to be. But at a minimum, the fish commission and its staff must examine all options with an open mind, providing a viable path forward for gillnetters who represent a proud tradition on the river.

Fish and wildlife management demands well-informed and nuanced responses to ever-changing natural conditions. These choices are now further complicated by an expanding human population in the Pacific Northwest and changes in the ocean and climate. Smart pragmatism is demanded, not ideological rigidity. Buckmaster has the perspective to help the commission achieve the right balance of aspiration and reality.

Zombies of the 2016 election

By PAUL KRUGMAN
New York Times News Service

Last week, a zombie went to New Hampshire and staked its claim to the Republican presidential nomination.

Well, OK, it was actually Gov. Chris Christie of New Jersey. But it's pretty much the same thing.

You see, Christie gave a speech in which he tried to position himself as a tough-minded fiscal realist. In fact, however, his supposedly tough-minded policy idea was a classic zombie — an idea that should have died long ago in the face of evidence that undermines its basic premise, but somehow just keeps shambling along.

But let us not be too harsh on Christie. A deep attachment to long-refuted ideas seems to be required of all prominent Republicans. Whoever finally gets the nomination for 2016 will have multiple zombies as his running mates.

Start with Christie, who thought he was being smart and brave by proposing that we raise the age of eligibility for both Social Security and Medicare to 69. Doesn't this make sense now that Americans are living longer?

No, it doesn't. This whole line of argument should have died in 2007, when the Social Security Administration issued a report showing that almost all the rise in life expectancy has taken place among the affluent. The bottom half of workers, who are precisely the Americans who rely on Social Security most, have seen their life expectancy at age 65 rise only a bit more than a year since the 1970s. Furthermore, while lawyers and politicians may consider working into their late 60s no hardship, things look somewhat different to ordinary workers, many of whom still have to perform manual labor.

And while raising the retirement age would impose a great deal of hardship, it would save remarkably little money. In fact, a 2013 report from the Congressional Budget Office found that raising the Medicare age would save almost no money at all.

But Christie — like Jeb Bush, who quickly echoed his proposal — evidently knows none of this. The zombie ideas have eaten his brain.

And there are plenty of other zombies out there. Consider, for example, the zombification of the debate over health reform.

Before the Affordable Care Act



Paul Krugman



Tyson Trish/The Record of Bergen County via AP
 Governor Chris Christie hosts his 136th New Jersey Town Hall Meeting at the Essex County College Public Safety Academy in Cedar Grove, N.J. Thursday.

went fully into effect, conservatives made a series of dire predictions about what would happen when it did. It would actually reduce the number of Americans with health insurance; it would lead to "rate shock," as premiums soared; it would cost the government far more than projected, and blow up the deficit; it would be a huge job-destroyer.

In reality, the act has produced a dramatic drop in the number of uninsured adults; premiums have grown much more slowly than in the years before reform; the law's cost is coming in well below projections; and 2014, the first year of full implementation, also had the best job growth since 1999.

So how has this changed the discourse? On the right, not at all. As far as I can tell, every prominent Republican talks about Obamacare as if all the predicted disasters have, in fact, come to pass.

Finally, one of the interesting political developments of this election cycle has been the triumphant return of voodoo economics, the "supply-side" claim that tax cuts for the rich stimulate the economy so much that they pay for themselves.

In the real world, this doctrine has an unblemished record of failure. Despite confident right-wing predictions of doom, neither the Clinton tax increase of 1993 nor the Obama tax increase of 2013 killed the economy (far from it), while the "Bush boom" that followed the tax cuts of 2001 and

2003 was unimpressive even before it ended in financial crisis. Kansas, whose governor promised a "real live experiment" that would prove supply-side doctrine right, has failed even to match the growth of neighboring states.

In the world of Republican politics, however, voodoo's grip has never been stronger. Would-be presidential candidates must audition in front of prominent supply-siders to prove their fealty to failed doctrine. Tax proposals like Marco Rubio's would

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create a giant hole in the budget, then claim that this hole would be filled by a miraculous economic upsurge. Supply-side economics, it's now clear, is the ultimate zombie: no amount of evidence or logic can kill it.

So why has the Republican Party experienced a zombie apoc-

alyse? One reason, surely, is the fact that most Republican politicians represent states or districts that will never, ever vote for a Democrat, so the only thing they fear is a challenge from the far right. Another is the need to tell Big Money what it wants to hear: a candidate saying anything realistic about Obamacare or tax cuts won't survive the Sheldon Adelson/Koch brothers primary.

Whatever the reasons, the result is clear. Pundits will try to pretend that we're having a serious policy debate, but, as far as issues go, 2016 is already set up to be the election of the living dead.

Obama's Nixon doctrine: anointing Iran

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER
Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — In December, President Obama said that he wished to see Iran ultimately become a "very successful regional power."

His wish — a nightmare for the Western-oriented Arab states — is becoming a reality. Consider:

- Gulf of Aden: Iran sends a flotilla of warships and weapons-carrying freighters to reinforce the rebels in Yemen — a noncontiguous, non-Persian, nonthreatening (to Iran) Arabian state — asserting its new status as regional bully and arbiter. The Obama administration sends an aircraft carrier group, apparently to prevent this gross breach of the U.N. weapons embargo on Yemen. Instead, the administration announces that it has no intention of doing anything. Meanwhile, it exerts pressure on Saudi Arabia to halt its air war over Yemen and agree to negotiate a political settlement involving Iran.

- Russia: After a five-year suspension, Russia announces the sale of advanced surface-to-air missiles to Iran, which will render its nuclear facilities nearly invulnerable to attack. Obama's reaction? Criticism, threats, sanctions? No. A pat on the back for Vladimir Putin: "I'm, frankly, surprised that (the embargo) held this long."

- Iran: Week before last, Obama pre-emptively caved on the long-standing U.S. condition that there be no immediate sanctions relief in any Iranian nuclear deal. He casually dismissed this red line, declaring that what is es-

pecially important is whether sanctions can be reimposed if Iran cheats. And it doesn't stop there. *The Wall Street Journal* reports that Obama is offering Tehran a \$30 billion to \$50 billion signing bonus (drawn from frozen Iranian assets) — around 10 percent of Iranian GDP.

- Syria: After insisting for years that President Bashar al-Assad of Syria "step aside," the U.S. has adopted a hands-off policy toward a regime described by our own secretary of state as an Iranian puppet.

- Iraq: Iran's Quds Force Commander Qassem Suleimani, director of Shiite militias that killed hundreds of Americans during the Iraq War and were ultimately defeated by the 2007-08 U.S. surge, operates freely throughout Iraq flaunting his country's dominance. In March, he was directing the same Iraqi militias, this time against the Islamic State — with the help of U.S. air cover.

This is the new Middle East. Its strategic reality is clear to everyone: Iran rising, assisted, astonishingly, by the United States.

Obama's initial Middle East strategy was simply withdrawal. He would enter history as the ultimate peace president, ushering in a new era in which "the tide of war is receding." The subsequent vacuum having been filled, unfortunately and predictably, by various enemies, adversaries and irredeemables, Obama lighted upon a new idea: We don't just withdraw, we hand the baton. To Iran.

Obama may not even be aware that he is recapitulating the Nixon doctrine, but with a fatal twist. Nixon's main



Charles Krauthammer

focus was to get the Vietnamese to take over that war from us. But the doctrine evolved and was generalized to deputize various smaller powers to police their regions on our behalf. In the Persian Gulf, our principal proxy was Iran.

The only problem with Obama's version of the Nixon doctrine is that Iran today is not the Westernized, secu-

lar, pro-American regional power it was under the shah. It is radical, clerical, rabidly anti-imperialist, deeply anti-Western. The regime's ultimate — and openly declared — strategic purpose is to drive the American infidel from the region and either subordinate or annihilate America's Middle Eastern allies.

Which has those allies in an understandable panic. Can an American president really believe that appeasing Iran — territorially, economically, militarily and by conferring nuclear legitimacy — will moderate its behavior and ideology, adherence to which despite all odds is now yielding undreamed of success?

Iran went into the nuclear negotiations heavily sanctioned, isolated internationally, hemorrhaging financially — and this was even before the collapse of oil prices. After 17 months of serial American concessions, the Iranian economy is growing again, its forces and proxies are on the march through the Arab Middle East and it is on the verge of having its nuclear defiance rewarded and legitimized.

The Saudis are resisting being broken to Iranian dominance. They have resumed their war in Yemen. They are resisting being forced into Yemen negotiations with Iran, a country that is, in the words of the Saudi ambassador to the U.S., "part of the problem, not part of the solution."

Obama appears undeterred. He's determined to make his Iran-first inverted Nixon Doctrine a reality. Our friends in the region, who for decades have relied on us to protect them from Iran, look on astonished.

State auditor holds benefit for Oregon

Despite scandal, Washington state's model holds up

What happens when the person responsible for rooting out waste and fraud in state and local governments may be a crook? Our neighbor to the north is about to find out.

Last week, a federal grand jury indicted Washington's state auditor on 10 felony counts involving his private business practices. The indictment claims Troy Kelley devised schemes to defraud title companies and their borrowers of nearly \$3 million from 2006 to 2008. Kelly also is charged with failing to pay \$1 million in income taxes for those years by under-reporting his income.

The indictment does not accuse Kelley of criminal activity involving his duties as state auditor. However, Acting U.S. Attorney Annette Hayes said Kelley "spun a web of lies" in a cover-up during his tenure as state auditor.

It's a stunning downfall for the state's top fiscal watchdog. *The News Tribune* of Tacoma describes the man: "In the span of six years, Troy Kelley rose from political obscurity to state-wide office, capturing a series of state House campaign victories on his way to winning election as Washington's auditor. ... He projected a spit-polished image that sold well politically: a dedicated family man who served his country, a successful lawyer and businessman eager to lead. ... Boosted by a sterling resumé, with

stops at the Department of Justice and a Fortune 500 company."

Kelley, a Tacoma Democrat, pleaded not guilty to the charges and vowed to clear his name. And despite calls from Gov. Jay Inslee, political leaders of both parties and most Washington newspapers, the 50-year-old refuses to resign. And that's where the political intrigue begins.

Kelley said he intends to take a leave of absence starting May 1 to pursue his legal fight. That move allows Kelley to continue to collect his state paycheck of \$116,950.

Washington's travails offer a cautionary tale for Oregonians who would like an elected state auditor. But our current system of having the Secretary of State's office handle this responsibility is flawed.

Oregon is the only state where the secretary of state is responsible for auditing public spending. With Oregon spending more than \$40 billion each year, the audit function should be separate and independent.

An elected auditor would report directly to the citizens and be charged with representing the sole interest of the public. Washington state has demonstrated this public benefit for more than a century.

Voters may select a bad apple like Troy Kelley. But voters, not career politicians, should determine the person best suited to restore that trust.