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OUR VIEW

Hayes on the sidelines, but damage is done

At his Friday press conference, Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber said his fiancee Cylvia Hayes will have no policy role during the remainder of his fourth term. Kitzhaber was forced into that declaration by news reports generated by Hillary Borrud in the Salem bureau of the EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

While it was useful to have the governor clarify where Hayes stands in the Kitzhaber administration, the question remains: Exactly what policies did she influence during his third term — and who exactly was she working for? The Register-Guard of Eugene has asked the "question of how many shoes were still waiting to drop."

Especially when it comes to environmental policies, which were Hayes' "passion," it's hard to look at any decision or position and not wonder who was making the wheels turn, and which wheels were getting greased. Coal exports in our corner of the state, gillnet fishing at the mouth of the Columbia, low-carbon fuel standards — the stink of ethics violations are all over them now.

And that's exactly what it is. People are quick to judge actions by their outcome, and that's why the outrage over the First Lady's shady employment history has been muted. Those who are pleased with the enviro-friendly direction this administration has taken us have sort of shrugged off the $118,000 in untaxed income Hayes took from the Clean Economy Development Center in 2011 and 2012.

And it's true, if the governor had never met Hayes he may have made the exact same decisions. But the failure of the administration to take these violations seriously is the big problem. They point, again, to a lack of interest in serving Oregon.

The essence of Gov. Kitzhaber's Cylvia Hayes problem was described succinctly by Brent Walth, Gov. Tom McCall's biographer and managing editor of Willamette Week, during a talk last November to Columbia Forum in Astoria. Said Walth: "I didn't think we'd ever see, in my life, the office put up for sale, but that's exactly what we've seen."

The tragedy of John Kitzhaber stems from a mistake as old as Shakespeare. Kitzhaber has stayed too long. All politicians and celebrities nurture their myths. The reason that John Kitzhaber is having such a hard time reckoning with the damage that Cylvia Hayes has done him is that the John Kitzhaber of myth (the first and second term Kitzhaber) was never this foolish.

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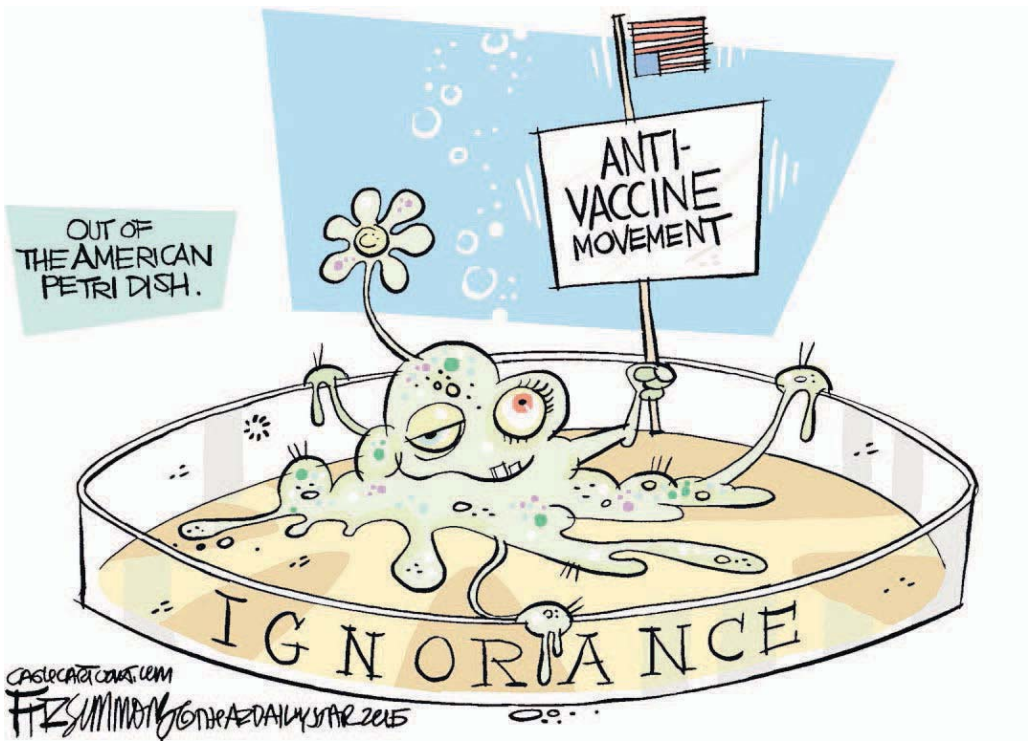
Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.



OTHER VIEWS

The long-run cop-out

PAUL KRUGMAN
Comment

On Monday, President Barack Obama called for a significant increase in spending, reversing the harsh cuts of the past few years. He won't get all he's asking for, but it's a move in the right direction. And it also marks a welcome shift in the discourse. Maybe Washington is starting to get over its narrow-minded, irresponsible obsession with long-run problems and will finally take on the hard issue of short-run gratification instead.

OK, I'm being flip to get your attention. I am, however, quite serious. It's often said that the problem with policymakers is that they're too focused on the next election, that they look for short-term fixes while ignoring the long run. But the story of economic policy and discourse these past five years has been exactly the opposite.

Think about it: Faced with mass unemployment and the enormous waste it entails, for years the Beltway elite devoted almost all their energy not to promoting recovery, but to Bowles-Simpsonism — to devising "grand bargains" that would address the supposedly urgent problem of how we'll pay for Social Security and Medicare a couple of decades from now.

Am I saying that the long run doesn't matter? Of course not, although some forms of long-termism don't make sense even on their own terms. Think about the notion that "entitlement reform" is an urgent priority. It's true that many projections suggest that our major social insurance programs will face financial difficulties in the future (although the dramatic slowing of increases in health costs makes even that proposition uncertain). If so, at some point we may need to cut benefits. But why, exactly, is it crucial that we deal with the threat of future benefits cuts by locking in plans to cut future benefits?

Anyway, even where the long-term issues are real, it's truly strange that they have so often taken center stage in recent years. We are, after all, still living through the aftermath of a once-in-three-generations financial crisis. America seems, finally, to be recovering — but Bowles-Simpsonism had its greatest influence precisely when the U.S. economy was still mired in a deep slump. Europe has hardly recovered at all, and there's overwhelming evidence that austerity policies are the main reason for that ongoing disaster. So why the urge to change the subject to structural reform? The answer, I'd suggest, is intellectual laziness and lack of moral courage.

About laziness: Many people know what John Maynard Keynes said about the long run, but far fewer are aware of the context. Here's what he really said: "But this long run is a misleading guide to current affairs. In the long run we are all dead. Economists set themselves too easy, too useless a task if in tempestuous seasons they can only tell us that when the storm is long past the ocean is flat again."

Quite. All too often, or so it seems to me, people who insist that questions of austerity and stimulus are unimportant are actually trying to avoid hard thinking about the nature of the economic disaster that has overtaken so much of the world.

And they're also trying to avoid taking a stand that will expose them to attack. Discussions of short-run fiscal and monetary policy are politically charged. Oppose austerity and support monetary expansion and you'll be lambasted by the right; do the reverse and you'll be criticized and maybe ridiculed by the left. I understand why it's tempting to dismiss the whole debate and declare that the really important issues involve the long run. But while people who say that kind of thing like to pose as brave and responsible, they're actually ducking the hard stuff — which is to say, being craven and irresponsible.

In today's economic and political environment, long-termism is a cop-out, a dodge, a way to avoid sticking your neck out. And it's refreshing to see signs that Obama is willing to break with the long-termers and focus on the here and now.

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Paul Krugman joined The New York Times in 1999 as a columnist on the Op-Ed Page and continues as professor of Economics and International Affairs at Princeton University.

YOUR VIEWS

County commissioners prepare to accept Forest Service demands

For anyone that reads this, I would like to let you know the elected body that you call county commissioners is preparing to sign over their jobs of protecting the health, safety and welfare of your county to the U.S. Forest Service and with it the vote you cast for them.

On Jan. 28 the Forest Service held a meeting in Pendleton to attempt to get county commissioners from Baker, Grant, Harney, Morrow, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, and Wheeler counties in Oregon along with Asotin, Columbia, Garfield and Walla Walla counties in Washington. The document they asked them to sign was a Memorandum of Understanding that the counties would function as "cooperating agencies" under the guidance of the U.S. Forest Service, giving the Forest Service status as the lead agency and firmly putting your elected officials in the back seat of the decision-making process.

No county commissioners signed the document on the 28th, but Mr. Gratsy of Harney County and Mr. Davidson and McClure of Union County have stated they more than likely will sign the document. I do not believe any of us voted to place these people into the jobs they currently hold to have them sign over their decision-making authority to the Forest Service.

The counties have a way of fully protecting our positions by entering into a coordination agreement with the Forest Service that requires the Forest Service to align their land management use plan with each individual county, and not lump counties together and allow the Forest Service to make their decisions for them.

Within our county courts over the next few weeks a vote will be held to decide if your county commissioners should accept cooperating agency status or not. The answer is simple: NO THEY SHOULD NOT.

You need to tell them that, point blank.

John D. George
Bates, Ore.

Measles? What's the big deal?

There has been a lot in the news about new measles cases. Apologies to my friends in the medical profession, but this side does need to be covered. It isn't being covered by the news media.

I'd say about 99.9 percent of us baby boomers had the measles. I did, but don't remember it. I suspect that is similar for many in the baby boomer age range. It was more of a hardship on my mom, having to care for sick children, than it was on us. Our immunity is now strong and permanent.

Some mothers in those days would publicize on a bulletin board that their children had the measles so other mothers could bring their children over, so their children would get the measles and have this strong, permanent immunity. (But that didn't make pharmaceutical companies any money.)

Vaccination for diseases that can be dealt with by proper sanitation, herbs, healthy fluids and foods, as well as parental time and caring is not for the health of the children. It is for convenience.

If the money spent on pushing vaccinations of such diseases would be spent instead on educating the public about good housekeeping, healthy fluids and foods, the children would be healthier. (Oh, but suggesting people not drink soda pop and not eat nutrition-less food would make Coca Cola and Pepsico and other junk food companies mad. They would get their lobbyists to squelch that immediately.)

Yes, there are the problems of Third World living conditions within our communities, and problems of sick people not staying home and putting pregnant women and newborns at extra risk. We have that now with the influenza going around.

By the way, if vaccinations work, why all the concern in news stories about keeping vaccinated children separate from non-vaccinated children?

There are modern illnesses causing children to suffer and die. It would be interesting to see the causes of death and types of illnesses children had 50 years ago vs. today. Any high school or college student want to research and report back in the newspaper?

Garnet Olson
Pendleton

Pendleton city father better suited for Main Street statue

I agree with Mike Forrester and Fritz Hill regarding the location of the bronze statue of Don Requa. I personally feel that a location at the high school would be more fitting, as Requa was more of inspiration to all of the athletics that trained under him than he was to the development and history of the city of Pendleton.

In keeping with the historical theme of downtown Pendleton, one suggestion that might be considered in the future for the Brownfield location would be a statue of Moses E. Goodwin, who in 1868 deeded land to Umatilla County that was platted as the beginnings of the city. Goodwin also constructed the first bridge across the Umatilla River, which was located at the current location of the Main Street Bridge that is adjacent to Brownfield Park.

Without his insight, the city of Pendleton and the county seat of Umatilla County may never have existed.

Rick Vogel
Pendleton

County takes federal payments instead of SRS dollars

Ordinarily I wouldn't respond to a news story with a letter to the editor, however I was in the business long enough to know that corrections to front page stories wind up in a couple of lines at the bottom of Page 2.

My reference is to Senator Wyden's efforts to fund the Secure Rural Schools Act. I was quoted as saying this isn't a huge deal to Umatilla County because out of a $65 million budget, $931,000 isn't a big deal. It isn't a big deal to Umatilla County in the way it is to other counties because we choose another option.

What I actually said was the SRS is a much bigger deal to other counties than it is to Umatilla County because we opt to take PILT payments, mainly in lieu of SRS payments, and last year we received $1,044,000, which is a big deal. Had we taken the SRS option, we would not have received the PILT monies.

From PILT we did receive $72,000, which went to our road department, but that's the most we could have received from SRS. While I would love to have gotten almost a million dollars in additional payments from SRS, you can't have your cake and eat it too.

We are pleased we chose the PILT option, which delivered over a million dollars to the county. Otherwise, we would be standing in line behind Senator Wyden's initiative in hopes of getting a lesser amount. SRS is extremely important to other counties and I applaud Senator Wyden's efforts on their behalf.

Both PILT and SRS are part of a commitment the federal government made to states like Oregon over a century ago. Our economy, like that of most other western states, is stifled by the fact the federal government owns enormous sections of land.

In Eastern states, federal ownership is often runs well under five percent. In the West, the norm is closer to fifty percent. PILT and SRS aren't luxuries — they are genuinely payments in lieu of taxes — taxes we would have received if the federal government didn't insist on owning such a massive portion of our resources.

A million dollars is a very big deal to Umatilla County and we were excited to receive the PILT payment last year. Unfortunately, the SRS efforts aren't going to impact us should they be successful.

George Murdock
Umatilla County Commissioner
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

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