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OUR VIEW

Cover Oregon much more than a tech failure

Last week, the state legislature passed a bill to dissolve Cover Oregon. The only thing now keeping the troubled state exchange from being euthanized is Governor Kate Brown's signature.

If Brown complies, as is expected, Cover Oregon will drift off toward the bright light of history. And history will not shine kindly on the exchange. It will go down as Oregon's biggest tech debacle ever, and you could exclude the word "tech" and still make a credible case. The biggest debacle in Oregon government history? It is, as people like to say, *in the conversation*.

Cover Oregon has now cost \$300 million and did not benefit anyone. It signed not a soul up for health insurance. Heck, it didn't pave a road or build a bridge. We didn't even get to buy a Hawaiian island (like the one Oracle founder Larry Eillison purchased for \$300 million in 2012) or throw an epic statewide parade. That makes the failed exchange a terrible disappointment and a waste of money, without even mounds of ticker tape to show for it.

But while the Cover Oregon failure may be the bright, sticky icing on the cake, there is mounting evidence that the cake itself had plenty of its own problems.

Our state government failed us from the beginning. Now-disgraced governor John Kitzhaber was a strong proponent of President Obama's nationwide health care reform, and he advocated for Cover Oregon. Kitzhaber was always prone to big ideas, yet sported blinders on the details. Without a program manager, the buildout and preparation was poor.

It also came at a time when investigative reporting on the state capital was at all-time low. *The Oregonian* was pulling back and shifting focus from more in-depth, print-oriented statehouse reporting to a quicker Internet-based beast known as OregonLive. More peripheral outlets like yours truly

had yet to fill that lack of coverage with our own reporting. There were few nagging journalists peppering Kitzhaber and the Cover Oregon crew with persistent questions.

Then came D-Day. The Cover Oregon rollout was a disaster, and it didn't take long before everyone was running for political cover. The hunky-dory ad campaign added insult to injury, almost advertising a blithe ignorance of the systemic flaws in the program.

Kitzhaber, preparing for his own re-election, was one of the first to duck and run. If you can remember (this was many scandals ago), he asked Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum to sue Oracle, who was under a government contract to build the online exchange. And he campaigned to scrap the system that just months before he was promoting as proof of Oregon's genius.

Eventually, he won that argument. Cover Oregon was sent underground while the federal portal went into use.

Yet the indignities to the state continue. Oracle counter-sued the state and last week sued Kitzhaber staffers, saying they advised the governor to trash the exchange not because it was systemically broken, but because that would be his best political move. The company is pretty much saying that Kitzhaber's staff acted against the state's best interest in order to get him re-elected.

Emails leaked to *The Willamette Week* show Kitzhaber was well aware of what a political anchor around his neck the failed exchange was, and he wanted it off the front pages of newspapers across the state. What he and his political operatives did to make that a reality will be hotly contested going forward.

It's layer upon layer of questionable decisions. A total mess, followed up by a klutzy attempt at recovery.

We can only say, using the online lingo of the day: epic fail.

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

Reduce exemptions for vaccines

Baker City Herald

The "debate" over vaccinations is misnamed.

That vaccines are overwhelmingly effective and safe has been proved beyond any reasonable doubt by decades of unimpeached scientific studies.

But even if for some peculiar reason you aren't convinced by the published research of the world's eminent immunologists, you need only consider how vaccines have changed America for the better.

Kids don't die from polio or survive the disease but with crippling, permanent injury, as was depressingly common as recently as the 1950s.

Other diseases that were once widespread — measles, mumps, whooping cough — have been nearly eradicated as well.

The sole reason for these improvements is vaccines.

Vaccines aren't perfect, of course.

Very rarely they're ineffective for an individual. Even more rarely, a vaccine can seriously harm a child.

Unfortunately, the minuscule risk of vaccines has been exaggerated to the point that in some places enough parents are withholding vaccines from their children that dangerous diseases we had nearly forgotten in America have been infecting more people than any time in past several decades.

Oregon, sadly, is a leader in this trend.

Our state has the highest rate of students who aren't fully vaccinated. Not coincidentally, Oregon reported more

than 900 cases of whooping cough in 2012 — the state's most in more than 50 years.

A state legislator wants to reverse this trend. Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, who is a medical doctor, is sponsoring Senate Bill 442. Under the current law, parents who don't want their kids to be vaccinated, but still enroll them in public school, can opt out of inoculations for medical, religious or philosophical reasons. In effect, for any reason they want.

SB 442 would get rid of the latter two exemptions, leaving only the medical one, which of course is legitimate. The bill would apply not only to public schools, but also to students who want to attend private schools or daycares.

Oregon would join Mississippi (which averages just 60 to 100 whooping cough cases per year) and West Virginia as states that allow only a medical exemption from vaccinations for students attending public schools.

The Legislature should pass SB 442, and Gov. Kate Brown should sign it into law.

Parents could still say no to vaccines for their kids, of course. That option should always be available; it is, after all, a free country.

But Oregon shouldn't continue to be so accommodating to those parents. That approach has helped almost-banished diseases revive and endangered students and others who, for various medical reasons, can't be vaccinated. That's unacceptable — the more so since it's a threat we've proved as a society can be almost completely avoided.



OTHER VIEWS

Leaving and cleaving

So much of life is about leaving: moving from home to college, from love to love, from city to city and from life stage to life stage.

In earlier times, leaving was defined by distance, but now it is defined by silence. Everybody everywhere is just a text away, a phone call away. Relationships are often defined by the frequency and intensity of communication between two people.

The person moving on and changing a relationship no longer makes a one-time choice to physically go to another town. He makes a series of minute-by-minute decisions to not text, to not email or call, to turn intense communication into sporadic conversation or no communication. His name was once constant on his friend's phone screen, but now it is rare and the void is a wound.

If you are like me you know a lot of relationships in which people haven't managed this sort of transition well. Communication that was once honest and life-enhancing has become perverted — after a transition — by resentment, neediness or narcissism.

We all know men and women who stalk ex-lovers online; people who bombard a friend with emails even though that friendship has evidently cooled; mentors who resent their former protégés when their emails are no longer instantly returned; people who post faux glam pictures on Instagram so they can "win the breakup" against their ex.

Instant communication creates a new sort of challenge. How do you gracefully change your communication patterns when one person legitimately wants to step back or is entering another life phase?

The paradox is that the person doing the leaving controls the situation, but greater heroism is demanded of the one being left behind. The person left in the vapor trail is hurt and probably craves contact. It's amazing how much pain there is when what was once intimate conversation turns into unnaturally casual banter, emotional distance or just a void.

The person left behind also probably thinks that the leaver is making a big mistake. She probably thinks that it's stupid to leave or change the bond; that the other person is driven by selfishness, shortsightedness or popularity.

Yet if the whole transition is going to be managed with any dignity, the person being left has to swallow the pain and accept the decision.

The person being left has to grant the leaver the dignity of her own mind, has to respect her ability to make her own choices



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

about how to live and whom to be close to (except in the most highly unusual circumstances). The person being left has to suppress vindictive flashes of resentment and be motivated by a steady wish for the other person's ultimate good. Without accepting the idea that she deserved to be left, the person being left has to act in a way worthy of her best nature, to continue the sacrificial love that the leaver may not deserve and may never learn about.

That means not calling when you are not wanted. Not pleading for more intimacy or doing the other embarrassing things that wine, late nights and instant communications make possible.

To be around college students these days is to observe how many parents have failed to start their child's transition into adulthood.

Maybe that will mean the permanent end to what once was, in which case at least the one left behind has lost with grace. But maybe it will mean rebirth.

For example, to be around college students these days is to observe how many parents have failed to successfully start their child's transition into adulthood.

The mistakes usually begin early in adolescence. The parents don't create a space where the child can establish independence. They

don't create a context in which the child can be honest about what's actually happening in his life. The child is forced to deceive in order to both lead a semi-independent life and also maintain parental love.

By college, both sides are to be pitied. By hanging on too tight, the parents have created exactly the separation they sought to avoid. The student, meanwhile, does not know if he is worthy of being treated as a dignified adult because his parents haven't treated him that way. They are heading for a life of miscommunication.

But if the parents lay down sacrificially, accept the relationship their child defines, then it can reboot on an adult-to-adult basis. The hiddenness and deception is no longer necessary. Texts and emails can flow, not as before, but fluidly and sweetly.

Communications technology encourages us to express whatever is on our minds in that instant. It makes self-restraint harder. But sometimes healthy relationships require self-restraint and self-quieting, deference and respect (at the exact moments when those things are hardest to muster). So today a new kind of heroism is required. Feelings are hurt and angry words are at the ready. But they are held back. You can't know the future, but at least you can walk into it as your best and highest self.

David Brooks became a *New York Times* Op-Ed columnist in September 2003. He has been a senior editor at *The Weekly Standard* and *the Atlantic Monthly*.

YOUR VIEWS

Mileage tax discrimination against rural Oregonians

The Oregon Department of Transportation will initiate a test of a new form of taxing gasoline by GPS tracking of miles beginning July 1 with 5,000 "volunteers," recognizing that the current gasoline tax results in fewer tax dollars with the increasing fuel efficiency of newer vehicles.

Besides the obvious and concerning privacy issues this entails and inability to protest our digital data (even the Pentagon has been breached in addition to numerous private sector businesses and innumerable health care electronic records), a deeper and more sinister process may be involved.

Our political divisions nationally and statewide can be defined by them vs. us, Democrats vs. Republicans, conservatives vs. liberals but also increasingly by the urban metropolitan vs. rural divide.

As the exodus from more rural, economically depressed areas to denser populated metropolitan areas with more economic and education opportunities these urban-rural divisions grow only stronger. Overwhelmingly, in Oregon generally controlled by the I-5 corridor and metro, people in rural mostly Republican,

conservative Oregon feel increasingly disenfranchised.

Taxing miles driven for rural areas, mostly eastern and southeastern Oregon where services are generally quite distant and a simple shopping trip or doctor visit may require hours of driving, is a disadvantage for rural Oregon. The metropolitan areas with established and reliable public transportation and much shorter driving distance will be more likely to endorse such a proposal, essentially penalizing the rest of the state. Since we in eastern and remote southeastern Oregon do not have a meaningful vote, this basically represents a tax shift to more rural areas and we have already seen where those dollars — our dollars — will be spent.

Besides the obvious issues of privacy and inability to protect that privacy, GPS miles driven in rural Oregon represents a regressive tax on those of us enslaved to out vehicles for the benefit of urban Oregon. Instead of drawing all of Oregon into a collective we, this is but another hidden method to further disenfranchise rural Oregon and divides us as a state by more than just the Cascades. Recognize this proposal for what it is: outright discrimination.

Tim Hanlon
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

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