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OUR VIEW

State hiding its own scam

DOE conceals rationale for energy credit discounts

Imagine a government agency that thwarts the will of elected officials, as it makes dubious deals with businesses, then tries to hide from the public the purported legal rationale for its actions.

No need to invent such a cagey agency. It already exists. Here in Oregon. It's called the state Department of Energy.

When the Oregon Legislature passed laws creating the Business Energy Tax Credit program, the purpose was to encourage individuals and businesses to invest in projects that were energy efficient or would use renewable sources. Recipients could use the credits to reduce their tax bill. The credits could also be transferred to a third party to raise capital.

The program and the prices were to be administered by the state Department of Energy. Hillary Borrud, a reporter with our Capital Bureau, uncovered how shoddy that oversight has been.

She revealed that Energy officials quietly stopped enforcing pricing and other rules for the credit transfers back in 2011. This allowed private brokers to arrange deals in which the prices were never verified by the state. It was later learned that some buyers avoided paying capital gains taxes on the transfer.

Energy's inconsistent handling of

the credits program is troubling and smacks of political favoritism. In the wake of these revelations, there has been a steady stream of resignations of Energy officials, including the head of the loan program and the agency's chief financial officer.

Gov. Kate Brown has asked the Legislature to review and then shut down the Business Energy Tax Credit program. That's not good enough. A full audit is warranted.

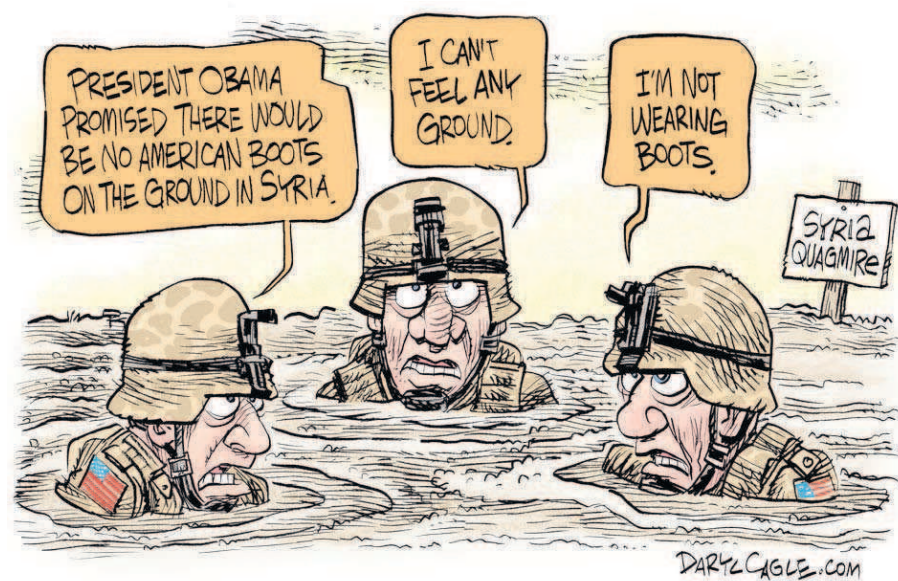
Gov. Kate Brown has asked the Legislature to review and then shut down the Business Energy Tax Credit program.

Gov. Brown should also order the release of a recent opinion on the matter by the Department of Justice. Energy officials have claimed for years that lawyers at Justice vetted and approved the discounted sales. If that's the case, why are Energy officials and the governor refusing to release that report?

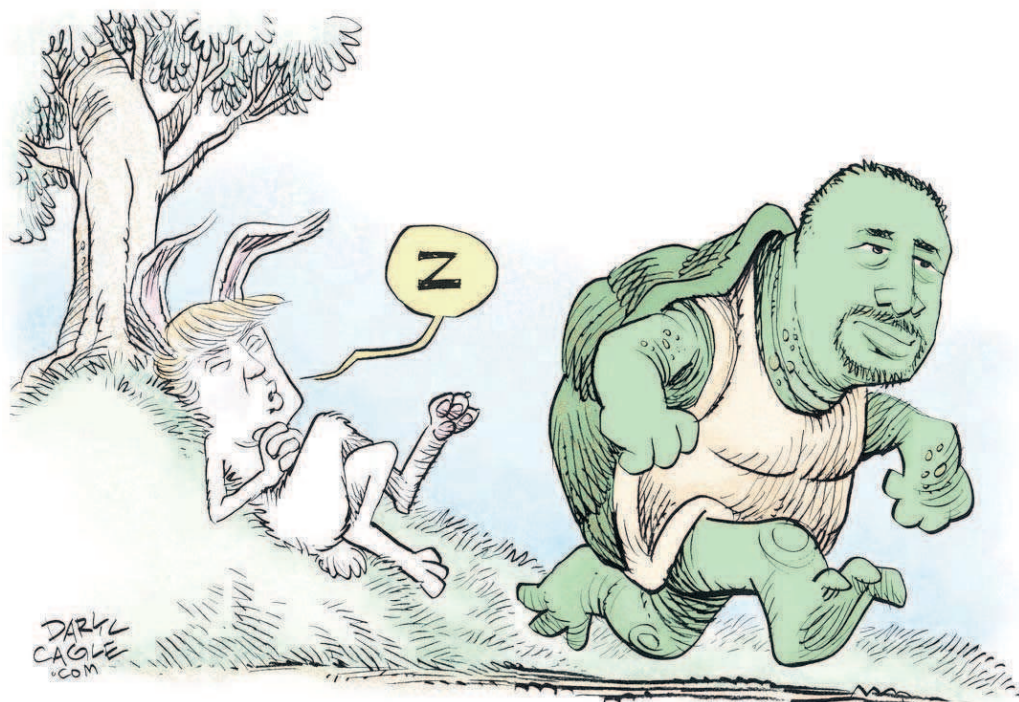
Our company, EO Media Group, along with Pamplin Media Group and *The Oregonian*, have been rebuffed in attempts to obtain the opinion under Oregon's Public Records Law. That law is aimed at ensuring that the public's business is transparent to its citizens and taxpayers.

Officials at the Department of Energy have ignored directions from the Legislature and its own administrative rules. Now they're hiding behind claims of attorney-client privilege. It's past time they give up this charade.

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



Ben Carson is inspiring, but not for president

Dr. Ben Carson has the most moving personal narrative in modern presidential politics. His mother, one of 24 children, had only a third-grade education. She was married at age 13, bore Ben and his brother, and then raised the boys as an impoverished single mother in Detroit. As a young boy, Carson was a terrible student. "Most of my classmates thought I was the stupidest person in the world," he recalls in his book "One Nation." "They called me 'Dummy.'"

But his mother responded by tightly limiting Ben's television time and requiring the boys to read two books a week from the library, and then submit book reports to her, even though she couldn't read them.

Carson evolved into an excellent student but still suffered from an explosive temper. When he was in the ninth grade, he argued with his friend Bob about what radio station to listen to, and, furious, tried to stab Bob in the stomach. Fortunately, the blade broke on Bob's belt buckle, and Carson had an epiphany that led him to curb his temper.

He attended Yale on a scholarship and became a brilliant neurosurgeon and best-selling author. He and his wife, Candy, started a scholarship program, the Carson Scholars Fund, now active in all 50 states, and he won the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He also comes across as a really nice guy.

And now he has surpassed Donald Trump to lead in a New York Times/CBS News poll for the Republican nomination for president.

In the end, I'm betting that Carson will lose. His candidacy has been propelled by his biography and first-rate demeanor, not by policies, and he has largely avoided close scrutiny. That will change as he tops polls.

Carson has a penchant for over-the-top statements, such as that Obamacare is "the worst thing that has happened in this nation since slavery." His assertions that Jews were slaughtered in Europe because they didn't have guns, or that we need guns in the home today to defend ourselves from Islamic militants — well, "kooky" is a polite way to describe those views.

Then there are his policy proposals, which are mostly vague or absurd or both. Carson wants to end Medicare and replace it with health savings accounts, and that pretty much makes him unelectable, although he's now backing away from his position. So my hunch is that the betting markets are right and that Sen. Marco Rubio will ultimately emerge as the nominee.

But maybe the more interesting question is what Carson says about America. He seems to see his rise as an indication that America needs not so much social programs as firmer character. In his moving memoir, "Gifted



NICHOLAS KRISTOF
Comment

Hands," he writes that he tries to be a role model for young blacks, explaining, "These young folks need to know that the way to escape their often dismal situations is contained within themselves."

He also offers a tinge of reproach for those who stumble. Carson likes to cite a poem by Mayme White Miller that suggests: "If things go bad for you ... You have yourself to blame."

Carson acknowledges that his family relied on food stamps — "we ... couldn't have made it without them" — but repeatedly warns that government benefits can breed dependency.

One reason he is popular on the right, I think, is that many conservatives feel bruised by liberals' jibes that they are closet racists or have no compassion for the poor. Supporting Carson validates their self-perception as good people who are doing the right thing by slashing social programs.

The problem is that there's growing evidence that Carson's policy solutions are plain wrong. Social support programs for young children in particular nurture opportunity and even save public money in the long run. When done right, these are investments with a high return.

Indeed, a careful 2012 study found that children who received food stamps in the 1960s (a group that included Carson) had better health outcomes even decades later as adults. So maybe Carson's accomplishments are also a tribute, in some tiny way, to the nutritional support he received as a child from food stamps. (He's probably rolling his eyes as he reads this!)

More broadly, Carson's rise from inner-city poverty is inspiring but not easily replicable. Muggsy Bogues became an NBA star even though he was 5 feet 3 inches tall, but short people are still at a disadvantage in basketball.

Inner-city black children, especially boys, face similar long odds. The reasons are complex and have to do with family structure, poverty and education, and also with discrimination. Devah Pager, a sociologist, sent out young black and white men to pose as job applicants and found that the whites were twice as likely to get callbacks as identically qualified black men. A white man with a felony conviction had as good a chance of getting a callback as a black applicant with a clean record.

So by all means let's celebrate Carson's achievements. But he's better as a role model than as a policymaker.

Nicholas D. Kristof, a columnist for The Times since 2001, is a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner who writes op-ed columns that appear twice a week.

OTHER VIEWS

Public records are the public's records

The (Bend) Bulletin, Oct. 29

When government has good news, it's beating down the doors to tell the public about it. When government has bad news, it's building a fortress of delay and costs to block the public from finding out what happened.

Last week, Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum convened the first meeting of a task force set up to make recommendations for improving Oregon's public records laws.

"Since 1973, when our public records law was enacted, hundreds of exemptions have been added," she said in a news release. "Now is the time to examine whether we have gone too far."

Some of the exemptions can be justified. Protecting trade secrets of businesses and home addresses of public safety officers can make a lot of sense.

But other exemptions are highly questionable. One hurts the public's ability to find out what happened when public employees are disciplined for misusing taxpayer money or violating the public trust. Another exemption enables government officials to claim they are only engaged in preliminary discussions about changes in public policy and don't have to release what they discussed. There is also a specific exemption

of records for candidates for president of Oregon Health & Science University.

The problems with Oregon's laws are not just the exemptions. It's how officials react when they get records requests.

Remember what former Gov. John Kitzhaber's strategy was with requests before he resigned. Delay, delay, delay. Oregon needed to get a new governor before many of the records were released. State law essentially has no deadlines to actually comply with a records request.

Cost is another issue. A few years ago, *The Bulletin* requested copies of emails between Bend-La Pine Schools and the Chalkboard Project, a nonprofit education group. There were almost 2,000 pages of emails. The district claimed it needed to charge *The Bulletin* nearly \$2,000 in legal fees to review them. Costs like that can be just another way of declining a request.

Of course, there can be legitimate reasons to vet records before they are released to the public. But also consider this: The district had already paid the lawyer his set fee for the year. And the district still claimed *The Bulletin* needed to pay for that same staff time.

The guiding principle of Oregon's public records is supposed to be that openness prevails. Censorship of public information needs to justify itself, not the public's right to know.

YOUR VIEWS

Boycott bloody films of hypocritical Tarantino

Quentin Tarantino has made a fortune making extremely violent movies where torture and murder are common themes. "Pulp Fiction," "Kill Bill," "Natural Born Killers" and "Reservoir Dogs" give you an idea of what he is capable of putting on the screen. And he has been rewarded for this by earning an Oscar ("Pulp Fiction"). The more bloody, gruesome and violent, the better Tarantino likes it.

At the recent New York rally of the "Black Lives Matter" folks in Washington Square Park, Tarantino led the rally against the police. Addressing the "Rise Up October" crowd, Tarantino yelled out through the microphones, "If you believe there's murder going on you need to rise up and stand up against it." He continued, "This is not being dealt with in any way at all. If it was being dealt with, these murdering cops would be in jail or at least facing charges." The crowd loved it and cheered loudly in agreement as they waved the "Murder By Police Is Still Murder" signs.

As Tarantino preached his hatred, New York cops and a good share of the nation were still mourning the ruthless, cold-blooded murder of one of their finest — Officer Randy Holder, also a black man — just four days prior to this "rally."

Officer Holder, a third-generation police officer, was answering the call of an armed robbery by a gang member and career criminal — also black. Holder was shot in the forehead and died instantly. That makes the fourth murder of a New York City Cop in just the last 10 months, and makes over 100 deaths of police officers nationwide this year.

The New York Police Department is calling for a boycott of all Tarantino films now and in the future. So please, if you agree this attitude is wrong and hateful, don't even rent one.

David Burns
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

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