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OUR VIEW

The system is stacked

It's no wonder people are lining up to vote for Donald Trump.

After reading the *East Oregonian* story "Lobbying, contributions dual paths to political clout" by Capital Bureau reporter Hillary Borrud, you too may be inclined to send a big broom to the White House and State Capitol and sweep out every vestige of the current political class.

The article detailed in numbers and personal examples the ease and mystery through which corporations and special interest groups are lobbying the state.

It's a closed circle of back-scratching in the halls of power, and it takes significant monetary investment in order to slip through.

Borrud reported one such case. In the last two years, a California company called Vitu spent more than \$200,000 on lobbying and campaign contributions in Oregon. That included \$20,000 to governor Kate Brown's campaign. And where was Kate Brown earlier this month? Touting Vitu at the company's headquarters right after it landed a state contract to provide electronic registration and titling services for Oregon car dealerships. Go figure.

We understand that every system needs "grease." That's one way things get done — partnerships, support, favors and recommendations. But cold hard

cash — and the lobbyists that flaunt it — have far too much power right now in Oregon.

There are ways to make the system better, though it won't be easy. It is difficult because lobbyists and the majority of legislators — who have the power now — like the current system as it is. They are shielded by state laws, have few limits on what they can do with their dollars, and can operate in a battered media landscape with little risk that any misdeeds will be uncovered.

To chip away at the status quo, voters should support term limits and lobbyist transparency. They should support clear public records laws that allow the media and concerned citizens to hold our leaders responsible. They should support strong campaign finance laws and hard caps on political donations. And they should hold politicians like Kate Brown to their word when they make promises of transparency and openness yet fail to follow through.

Trump is wrong. A lot. But he is right when he points out that the political system, as it exists now, is not interested in being helpful to the majority of middle-class Americans. It's much more interested in keeping the campaign dollars flowing, and having easy and unseen access to the lobbyists who hold the moneybags.

Cold hard cash — and the lobbyists who flaunt it — have far too much power in Oregon.

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

Partisanship torpedoes Cover Oregon investigation

The (Eugene) Register-Guard

A congressional committee wants to launch a criminal investigation into Cover Oregon, the state's ill-fated attempt to set up an online health insurance exchange.

More than \$300 million in federal money vaporized during this debacle, so Congress has a legitimate stake in finding out what went wrong.

But the proposal by the Republican-dominated House Oversight and Government Reform Committee is a thinly veiled attempt to target the state's Democratic leadership in an election year. It makes no pretense of attempting to find out how Cover Oregon operated or what went wrong.

Committee chairman Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah, said a committee report — titled "How Mismanagement and Political Interference Squandered \$305 Million Federal Taxpayer Dollars" — was the result of a year-long investigation.

Cover Oregon, which was approved by a bipartisan vote of the state Legislature in 2011, was envisioned as a one-stop social service hub, allowing people to shop for health insurance and other public services.

It was a grand idea. But it failed. State officials have blamed the company they contracted with, Oracle Corp., and sued the software giant.

Chaffetz has now waded into the fray, with letters to U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch and Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum demanding a criminal investigation — and prosecution — of state officials. Chaffetz also asked Rosenblum to recuse herself from any investigation because of her "closeness to several of the prospective defendants."

Chaffetz alleges state officials misused federal funds and commingled political and official funds to boost the political prospects of then-Gov. John Kitzhaber.

This isn't the first time congressional Republicans have targeted Cover Oregon in an election year. In 2014, Oregon Rep. Greg Walden sought an investigation by the Government Accounting Office.

Chaffetz's demand for criminal prosecution comes during another hotly contested election year.

Democrats on the House Oversight

Committee issued a minority report this week, flatly contradicting the GOP report on Cover Oregon. Democratic committee members laid the blame for Cover Oregon's failure at the feet of Oracle and said GOP committee members ignored the company's admissions that it massively "screwed up."

Oracle failed to deliver a functioning website by the deadline, admitted its work was deficient — as borne out by independent analysts — and misled state officials by claiming everything was on track when it wasn't, the minority report said.

Elijah Cummings, D-Md., the ranking minority member on the committee, stopped short of calling the GOP-led investigation a witch hunt. But he noted it focused on state officials, rather than the company responsible for the website. More than 170,000 pages of documents were obtained from the state government, including the governor's office, and only 3,200 pages from Oracle, Cummings said. There were no depositions or transcribed interviews with Oracle employees, he said.

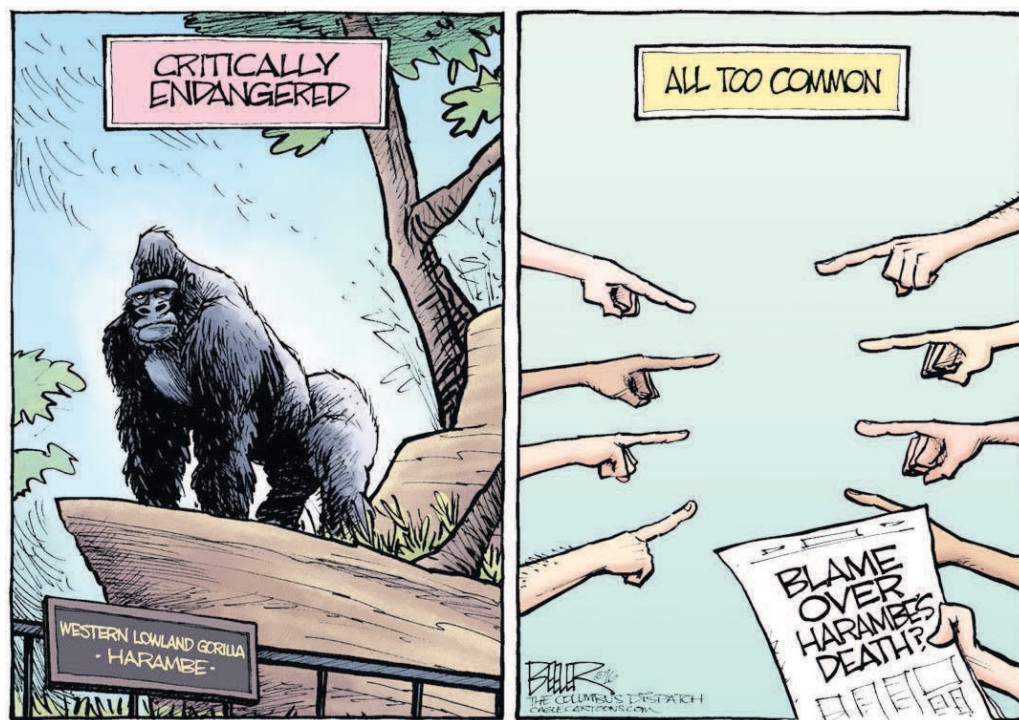
Chaffetz released the report as an "unofficial staff report" rather than an official committee report, thereby avoiding requirements that it be considered, debated, voted on and approved by the entire committee. This also meant the report was not subject to amendment or required to include minority views.

Cover Oregon was a failure that was costly both to the state and the federal government. An investigation into what went wrong and what, if anything, can be learned from it is warranted — as is a review of any official wrongdoing. Looking at how other state exchanges are faring also would be valuable.

But this report, timed for release in an election year and designed to avoid scrutiny or debate, is at best a distraction.

Affordable health care for everyone is a critically important issue for the United States and deserves careful consideration and sincere efforts to achieve this goal.

The attempt by the GOP majority in the House Oversight Committee, led by Chaffetz, to turn it into a political "gotcha" is disheartening. The country deserves better.



OTHER VIEWS

Why Trump attacked Martinez

Many observers were mystified when Donald Trump attacked New Mexico Republican Gov. Susana Martinez. But the story was really very simple: Martinez hit Trump, so Trump hit back. Especially now that Trump is the GOP's presumptive nominee, he attempted to make an example of a Republican who won't get with the program. It might work, or it might not, but from Trump's perspective it's the tactic he used to beat 15 rivals for the GOP nomination.

The Trump-Martinez bewilderment focused on four factors: Martinez is Hispanic, she's a woman, she's a Republican (head of the Republican Governors Association), and she's popular. "I think it sent all the wrong signals," said Newt Gingrich, who has generally been pro-Trump.

"You particularly don't want to see your candidate who needs to ... get stronger with Latinos, and stronger with women, attack a Latina woman Republican governor."

"(Trump) has a problem with women, Hispanics, and Republicans," said George Will on Fox News Sunday, "so he attacks a Republican Hispanic woman governor."

Trump ignored all those concerns. Also on Fox, campaign manager Corey Lewandowski explained that Trump's remarks about Martinez at a May 24 rally in Albuquerque — Trump said, "The governor has to do a better job. She's not doing the job" — was simply a continuation of Trump's habit of discussing economic problems wherever he travels. "Outlining the economy of a specific location is something that he has done across the country, everywhere we've gone, because we need to highlight the problems that we have and what we're going to do to fix those problems," Lewandowski said.

It's true. Trump has pointed to economic problems in state after state. But he has no more Republican rivals to defeat now, and he is trying to consolidate GOP support. And there are those problems with Hispanic and women voters. So why go on the offensive?

To Trump, there was something more important at work. "(Martinez) continues to attack him publicly and privately," one person in TrumpWorld told me recently. Trump has made a principle of hitting back harder than he is hit. And he has been so effective that many Republicans, elected and not, have decided the smart thing is to refrain from taking on Trump, even if they oppose him.

Not Martinez. In mid-April, the New Mexico governor issued a "remarkably strong rebuke" to Trump, in the words of a *Washington Post* report, when Martinez



BYRON YORK
Comment

spoke to a GOP fundraiser at the home of David Koch in Palm Beach, Florida. Martinez, according to the *Post*, "did not mince words. She told the crowd of about 60 wealthy GOP backers that, as a Latina, she was offended by Trump's language about immigrants. Noting her years working as a prosecutor on the Mexican border and now as a border-state governor, Martinez said Trump's plan to build a wall and force Mexico to pay for it was unrealistic and irresponsible, according to multiple people in attendance."

Team Trump believes Martinez has continued to criticize him in private since those remarks. And when Trump traveled to Albuquerque, after having clinched the Republican nomination, Martinez told reporters she was "really busy" and did not have time to attend.

Trump apparently felt it was more important to crack down on Republican resistance than ignore Martinez's opposition.

So Trump slammed Martinez for, among other things, the state of the economy and a rise in food stamp usage in New Mexico. "We have got to get your governor to get going," he said. "She's got to do a better job."

"There was no attack on a Latino or a woman governor," Lewandowski said on Fox. "What this was, was laying out the economic perspective of what the state of New Mexico was doing, and he's saying we need to do a better job."

It was that — plus a

threat to Martinez to get in line.

Trump confirmed as much at his news conference Tuesday. Asked why he went after Martinez, Trump said, "She was not nice. And I was fine — just a little bit of a jab. But she wasn't nice, and you think I'm going to change? I'm not changing, including with her."

Perhaps Martinez will change her tone after Trump wins New Mexico's primary on June 7. Perhaps not. As far as Trump is concerned, attacking Martinez, to the (unknown) degree that it angers Hispanic voters in general, could affect his fortunes far outside the boundaries of New Mexico. But Trump apparently felt it was more important now to crack down on Republican resistance, at least on GOP politicians who openly attack him, than it was to ignore Martinez's opposition.

It's not the way things are done these days. But the person in TrumpWorld looked back to a time when powerful party bosses would occasionally make an example of an off-the-reservation official just to inspire others to stay in line. That's still necessary, the person said, and that's what Donald Trump is doing.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.

YOUR VIEWS

New fire station needed, along with city manager leadership

In a May 11 column on this editorial page, I asked whether Pendleton's main fire station really needed to be replaced and urged a more businesslike approach in the way city officials deal with this subject. Since then, I was fortunate to get a tour of the fire station and I have read a consultant's report on it. Those two things have changed part of my earlier opinion.

In the tour offered by Fire Chief Mike Ciraulo, it was clear to me that the 57-year-old fire station is cramped in all respects. I think it needs to be replaced at a bigger site. The training tower on the current site cannot be used because it is full of fire department property forced out of the main building for lack of space. Fire trucks and other emergency equipment are backed into bays because the site is too small to allow access from two sides.

Diesel exhaust is a constant air pollution problem in the tightly packed bays. Firefighters of both genders are sandwiched into space for sleeping, food preparation and bathroom facilities. Space for communications and record keeping is over capacity.

But the diesel exhaust might stand for the No. 1 reason for a new fire station — worker safety. Doors and windows are not weatherized, ceilings leak, the building violates construction codes. When a big fire happens in town in the middle of the night, commotion inside that fire station must be something to behold.

A study report from a firm named Mackenzie Engineering provides information and detail on Pendleton's main fire station. It is available online.

As far as the way city hall is approaching fire station replacement, I still think it's better to follow the chain of command: Department heads report to the city manager, and the city manager advises the city council on the way to a final decision by the public.

Fire Chief Ciraulo is scheduling information meetings on the fire station and entertaining comments on prospective sites for a new firehouse. It's as if city manager Robb Corbett has designated Ciraulo to be the point man for the city on a new fire station. What is Corbett's role? If the city manager is not being the traffic cop or mediator in this issue, he should be.

Mike Forrester
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

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