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**OUR VIEW**

# Oregon politics need a deep cleaning

Richard L. Neuberger famously said that Oregon politics was so clean “it squeaks.” The prodigious writer and Democratic U.S. senator from our state may have been overly optimistic in the 1940s, when he uttered that line. But Neuberger’s characterization certainly doesn’t fit today’s statehouse.

## Appearances are everything in politics and government.

Gov. John Kitzhaber’s third term was ruined by his financially compromised girlfriend, Cylvia Hayes. She ran her own subsidiary business from an office down the hall from Kitzhaber’s chamber.

Kate Brown understood the need to scrub the governor’s suite when she suddenly took the oath of office in January 2015, upon Kitzhaber’s resignation. If the new governor announced one thing in her hastily prepared inaugural address, it was transparency. She wanted to enact rules that would insure against the kind of conflict of interest and self-dealing that Hayes exemplified in the Kitzhaber administration.

Sadly, Gov. Brown doesn’t seem to get it. *Willamette Week* last Wednesday published a revealing report by Nigel Jaquiss that describes key Brown subordinates who are clearly compromised.

Kristen Leonard, Brown’s chief of staff, and her husband own the company Election Solutions, which provides software to state agencies through Oregon Department of Administrative Services, which

reports to the governor’s office. The contract, worth north of \$200,000 over two years, was approved before Leonard joined Brown’s staff, but the conflict wasn’t disclosed.

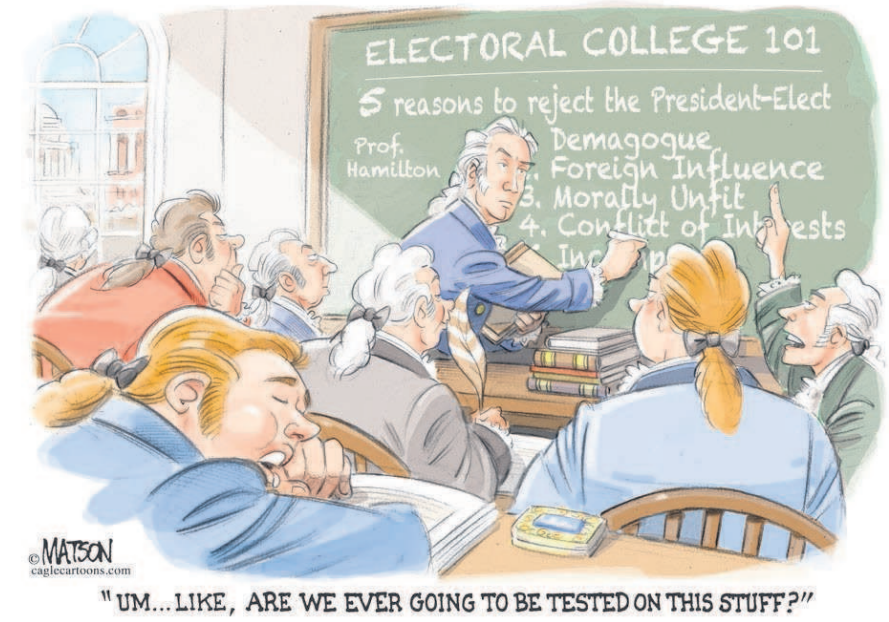
Abby Tibbs, Brown’s deputy chief of staff, has worked for both the governor and as an OHSU lobbyist for the past three months, according to the *Willamette Week’s* reporting. Tibbs has had a hand in crafting the state budget, which includes a big chunk of funding to the university.

In the simplest words, these Brown lieutenants are working for the governor and the state while also serving the financial interests of other entities. Neither Gov. Brown nor the employees have acknowledged this. The full article can be found at [www.wweek.com](http://www.wweek.com).

If you are familiar with the questions being raised about President-elect Donald Trump’s private holdings, you will get what’s disquieting about the predicament that Gov. Brown refuses to see. The problem Jaquiss describes is much smaller than Trump’s, but it is as plainly obvious.

Appearances are everything in politics and government. By ignoring the relevance of her inaugural proclamation, Gov. Brown seems to be telling the rest of us that she knows she can skirt the rules and win reelection simply because she’s a Democrat and backed by the public employees unions.

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.



**LETTERS POLICY**

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**PDX Commuters**  
December 14 at 8:07pm

This winter weather is a total nightmare! It took me THREE HOURS to drive TWO MILES to get home tonight! I hate the snow!!!!!!!!!!!!

Willamette Delivery, ODOT and 403,578 others

**Oregon Farmers** Gotta love this winter snow, though!  
Like · Reply · December 14 at 10:12pm

**Ski Oregon** Amen to that, bruh!  
Like · Reply · December 15 at 2:03am

**Oregon Skool Kidz** Snow Day- WAHOOOOO!!!!  
Like · Reply · December 15 at 7:24am

**Bonneville Dam** Snow makes the electricity flow, yo!  
Like · Reply · December 16 at 9:17am

**Wild Salmon**  
Like · Reply · December 17 at 12:32pm

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**OTHER VIEWS**

# Who needs more stuff?

It’s almost Christmas, and many procrastinators — myself included — are still searching for the perfect gift. Perhaps they are window shopping downtown. Perhaps they are working late nights in their shop or quilting chair to finish something beautiful for someone special.

But here’s some radical advice this gift giving season: Don’t do it.

Much of the developed world has hit “peak stuff.” Many Americans, and many people all over the world, have too much of everything. And our future happiness depends on realizing that.

This is, relatively, a good thing. We’re a materially sufficient society. And it’s not necessarily doom and gloom for many retail businesses, or the economy of the future. In fact, some of the world’s biggest makers of “stuff” are embracing the idea that the world doesn’t need more of that.

NPR reported earlier this year about hitting peak production, peak supply, and peak demand. Beef and sugar sales, for instance, cannot conceivably go any higher. We’re also — as a species — coming up against peak population, a hazy number that scientists and philosophers have been debating for centuries.

Still, there has to be a limit somewhere — whether it’s humans or candle holders. “The use of stuff is plateauing out,” IKEA executive Steve Howard told NPR last year. IKEA, of course, is a company that sells nothing but stuff — often cheap, easily replaceable stuff.

It reminds me of George Orwell’s classic dystopian novel “1984.” The government-controlled world of the future is in a perpetual state of war as a psychological control, but also as a means to destroy things. Because destroying things eventually requires rebuilding, and that requires the making and buying of stuff. An endless cycle.

Yet perhaps it is a cycle we can break. Those weirdo Europeans, who have a lot more old stuff than us, are thinking about ways to deal with the glut. The “Library of Things” in London is



TIM TRAINOR  
Comment

one answer — a sort of cooperative where people pay to rent everything from a carpet cleaner to a rake, from a backpack to a garden hose.

It helps city residents save money and save space, and it saves hundreds or thousands of duplicitous things from being purchased and thrown out and purchased again.

For a world that continues to see human populations expand, and a steady move from rural spaces into cities, space is a real concern.

Consider that the U.S. self storage industry generated \$27.2 billion in revenues in 2014, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. The newspaper noted that the industry has been the fastest growing segment of the commercial real estate industry over the last 40 years.

About 90 percent of the country’s storage units are in use, and about 10 percent of American households currently rent one.

It is important, too, to note that there are plenty of people out there, in this country and in others, who are in real need. They lack the stuff that make a life complete.

The Christmas season is perhaps the best time to think of them, and donate and give of ourselves and our dollars. A toy can brighten a child’s day, but food can give more deeper pleasure and a scholarship can brighten a lifetime. An hour of your time, a long-term mentorship and sustained neighborly care, can deeply and powerfully impact a person’s life. Teaching your child a family recipe or taking a friend to your favorite secret, snowy trail can fire new synapses in the brain. They can nourish the soul and open a new route to happiness. Giving the gift of time, even to yourself, can cure many ails.

Christmas is a spiritual holiday. And while everyone who wakes up Christmas morning to a BMW with a bow on it is sure to feel some real happiness, a longer and deeper peace can be found in having less stuff. And besides, renting a BMW means you don’t have to change the oil in the middle of winter.

Tim Trainor is opinion page editor of the East Oregonian.

**OTHER VIEWS**

# As times and tech change, so should meeting laws

The Oregonian, Dec. 7

Emails and texts speed communication, helping numerous people who may be miles away come together quickly for a conversation.

In almost real time, numerous people can simultaneously share information, answer questions and in some cases, make decisions.

Sounds an awful lot like a meeting, doesn’t it? That’s because it is. And though Oregon’s public meeting laws currently don’t define it that way, it’s long-past time that legislators update the definition of “meet,” “meeting,” and “deliberation” in a 43-year-old law created when our most advanced level of public communication was the fax machine.

Many city and county counsels had hoped a recent Oregon Supreme Court decision would provide that clarity for their elected officials once and for all. Yet the court avoided the issue of whether digital conversations count as actual meetings when it ruled last month on a convoluted case out of Lane County.

The original lawsuit contended, among a number of issues, that a series of group and one-on-one emails among three Lane County commissioners and administrators constituted a public meeting with a quorum of the board.

Former Lane County Commissioner Rob Handy had filed the suit against Lane County and three other commissioners. He’d argued that the other commissioners violated the law as they deliberated through emails and phone calls whether to release a letter accusing him of ethical and campaign finance violations.

His argument was that the group, including three of the five commissioners, had worked together in private to discuss releasing a public record.

When the suit ultimately ended up in the Oregon’s Court of Appeals last year, that three-judge panel ruled that in fact, a series of emails among a quorum of those subject to public meeting laws can achieve the same end as a more traditional, face-to-face gathering.

Judge Chris Garrett, who wrote the opinion, noted the Legislature’s explicit language of the law was “that decisions of governing bodies be arrived at openly.”

The Lane County case has since been remanded back to circuit court and could eventually end up back in appeals court — potentially providing clarity again. However, what’s simplest would be for lawmakers to address the definition this coming session and protecting the public’s right to transparency in world with increasing options for communication.

Public officials need the guidance. While some city and county attorneys have said they warn their council and commission members against hitting “reply all” to emails — and some ban so-called “serial meetings” — others say a meeting can only take place contemporaneously.

Intent is a slippery issue. It’s true many well-meaning public officials could get themselves in trouble when they shoot out group emails or texts regarding their work. No better reason than to make this rule clear and a regular part of municipalities’ training on public records law.

Of the many fixes needed to our statute, this one update — attempted but failed once before — is necessary and overdue. That’s especially true considering lawmakers’ current battle cries for accountability.

If lawmakers ignore this common sense catch-up of our meetings law, they ignore the issue of transparency.