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OUR VIEW

Tip of the hat; kick in the pants

We've kicked winter in the pants already this season, but let's turn around and give it a tip of the hat for turning our area into a winter wonderland, setting the table for an epic summer and what could be a monumental growing season.

Yes, we know the highways in our area have been closed as much as they've been open, and that car accidents and frozen pipes have been par for the course. Schools have been closed everywhere, causing severe interruption to education and to parents trying to get to work and secure child care, too. Those big dumps of snow on area roads have harmed local businesses as well.

But let's look on the white side!

Water supplies for wildlife and farmers are well above average — as high as 150 percent in some area drainages. That has a huge effect on industry and the environment, both of which have been thirsty for water for the better part of the decade. And there are similar statistics in large swaths of the west — from California to

Montana to Arizona — all places that have been mired in severe drought.

And it's not all bad news for the economy, as some local businesses have been going gangbusters — tow truck drivers, plumbers and pizza delivery drivers have never been in higher demand. You wish you had invested in a couple tons of rock salt back in September, don't you?

The below-zero temperatures sure cause pain in the extremities, the sidewalks in need of shoveling cause anxiety and later back pain, and having to drive for any distance will surely give you an ulcer.

But it's all part of living in Eastern Oregon. Everything has its season. And thanks to this most wintry of winters, we will benefit with the most summery of summers.



A tip of the hat to the tiny house reunion, which has gripped our readership area for the last week or two.

A traveler dropped the house at the One Stop Mart when he realized towing it over Cabbage Hill in a snowstorm would have been a bad idea. He thought it would be safe in the truck stop lot, but it soon went missing.

Possible sightings of the missing house were everywhere — some saw it in Idaho, some being trucked down to Pilot Rock, some readers saw that tiny house in their dreams.

In actuality, it was found no more than a mile from where it was left. A story with a happy ending: A man and his house, reunited. Now he just has to get it over that hill and fix a broken-down front door.



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

Conflict in the governor's office

The Oregonian, Jan. 6

Two of Gov. Kate Brown's top staffers stepped down recently following news reports that employment they held outside of her office could compromise their work for the government.

The governor's spokespeople argued the assertions were baseless as the story played out. And since the resignations were confirmed, they haven't acknowledged what might have been learned. What's so dismaying is how familiar it feels.

Willamette Week had raised potential conflict-of-interest questions about Kristen Leonard, Brown's chief of staff, and Abby Tibbs, her deputy chief of staff. A main issue for Leonard, who had served in the role since late 2015, centered on a software company she owns with her husband that has a \$214,000 contract with the state to provide agencies with a tool to track legislative bills.

Tibbs, who joined the office full-time in December, had been overseeing budget work for Brown since October while on leave from her job as a lobbyist for Oregon Health and Science University.

Both Leonard and Tibbs resigned this week and Brown's spokesman said the departures weren't related to the recent press reports.

Let's recall the point at which many Oregonians are starting from. It's not a smooth place of confidence and faith in their state government.

To be clear, unlike her predecessor, Brown has required that all of her policy advisers submit financial disclosure statements to the Oregon Government Ethics Commission outlining any substantial income they receive. The disclosures also apply to members of their household. She also passed legislation so that future governors must make the same requirement.

That's a fine step in the right direction. The "statement of economic impact" forms are typically only required of public officials. They are public documents that are relatively easy to track down on the ethics agency's website. But those forms don't paint a

full ethical picture. They're not filed in real time and are often vague.

For instance, Leonard's report on her 2016 financial information won't be filed until mid-April. Her 2015 form names the company that she and her husband own. It states that Leonard's household receives a salary from the company, Election Solutions, and provides a brief description of the company: "Software contract — BillTracker."

The form doesn't require Leonard to disclose that the company holds a six-figure contract with the state agency that Brown oversees. That requires more digging than should be expected of members of the public who Brown and her staff serve.

Oregonians need that map, but they also deserve the "X" that marks the spot. That's where conflict of interest disclosures come in. Those disclosures cover specific issues that may allow a state employee to potentially gain personally from their government work.

To continue her work in restoring Oregonians' trust in government, Brown should also require her employees complete those more detailed forms when her office becomes aware of a potential conflict.

It's true state law doesn't require the conflict disclosure unless a state employee is making an official decision on the specific issue. But what's legal isn't always the best politics. That's especially true for Brown, just two years after Gov. John Kitzhaber resigned over questions about ethics.

Disclosing conflicts can be easier for lawmakers, council members or commissioners, who can stand before a public meeting, announce their potential conflict and recuse themselves.

But the public isn't invited into the types of meetings where Leonard and Tibbs do much of their work.

Brown should take this chance to make another solid step down the path of transparency and post information from conflict of interest forms online, as the ethic commission does with financial disclosures. That would allow the public to find the information more easily and pave the way for such disclosures in other state agencies and local government.

OTHER VIEWS



Trump, sex and lots of whining

Finally, Donald Trump held a press conference. I know you want to hear the sex-in-Russia part.

The world learned this week about memos from a retired British intelligence officer on relations between the Trump campaign and the Russians. They included some speculation about whether there were compromising videos of Trump cavorting in a Russian hotel that might explain his enthusiastic support for Vladimir Putin.

The report wasn't prepared by our intelligence agencies — it was opposition research done on contract for some other campaigns. It had been bouncing around Washington for a while. You didn't hear about it because nobody could confirm any of the allegations.

But a summary of the memos showed up in the briefing Trump got from the intelligence agencies last week. Wouldn't you have liked to be there to see the reaction?

Then a version of the report showed up online, and naturally it came up Wednesday at Trump's press conference.

About that press conference. Here are some of the things we learned:

- The reason he hasn't shown up to answer questions from reporters since July is "inaccurate news."

- The Russians don't have any secret tapes of him behaving badly in a hotel room because every time he goes to hotels abroad, he warns everybody: "Be very careful, because in your hotel rooms and no matter where you go, you're gonna probably have cameras." Of everything Trump said during the press conference, this was perhaps the most convincing.

- He is not going to divest himself of his businesses, but his two adult sons will be running them. He was just doing this out of his ethical heart, since there are no conflict-of-interest rules for the president. ("... as president I could run the Trump Organization — great, great company. And I could run the company, the country. I'd do a very good job, but I don't want to do that.")
- He'll release his taxes once the audit is finished. (You remember that audit. Its friends call it Godot.)

- The inauguration is going to be "a beautiful event" because "we have great talent." (Military bands were mentioned.)

- "If Putin likes Donald Trump I consider that an asset, not a liability."
- "Over the weekend I was offered \$2 billion to do a deal in Dubai."

He was all over the place. It was, in a way, a great strategy. We've been waiting for a long time to hear how Trump would deal with his



GAIL COLLINS
Comment

businesses, and his refusal to divest drove ethics watchdogs crazy. But on Wednesday, the whole topic got drowned in the hubbub over the leaked report. And Trump's relationship with Vladimir Putin. And his theory on hotel cameras.

This kind of rapid-fire diversion could be the work of a political genius, but in fact it's just how our next president's mind naturally seems to operate. It bounces hither and yon. The only ongoing focus is what it all means

to Trump. Did he look good? How was the crowd? Did anyone betray him?

He was definitely playing the victim when it came to the leaked report. He blamed the intelligence services, which he compared, with great originality and careful choice of words, to Nazis.

Keep in mind that although government investigators have been looking into these allegations for a long time, they never became public during the campaign. "I would never comment on investigations

— whether we have one or not, in an open forum like this," FBI Director James Comey said during one of the multitudinous Senate hearings this week.

This is, of course, the same guy who told Congress — 11 days before the election — that the FBI was investigating Hillary Clinton emails that wound up on a laptop owned by Anthony Weiner, aka "Carlos Danger," the estranged husband of her aide and world-famous sex tester.

The FBI later announced it had found nothing. Meanwhile, people who were already voting in some states had been reminded to connect Clinton with a guy who sent pictures of his private parts to strange women. Clinton thinks it cost her the election. There's no way to tell. She got nearly 3 million more votes than Trump, but by the rules we live under, she lost. End of story.

Trump is never going to admit his win was anything but a record-shattering triumph. But his preening, and his whining about being persecuted by the intelligence services, really twists the knife.

Since the election, the media and many Democratic politicians have wrung their hands over their failure to pay attention to the legitimate anger in the Trump-tilting parts of the country. And good for them.

But it's time to remember that there are about 66 million Clinton voters who have a right to be angry, too.

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Gail Collins joined *The New York Times* in 1995 as a member of the editorial board and later as an Op-Ed columnist. In 2001 she became the first woman ever appointed editor of the *Times*'s editorial page.

YOUR VIEWS

Time for a change in Pendleton development

In a recent visit to the city of Portland, the leaders of the Pendleton Development Commission were introduced to the innerworkings of that city's PDC equivalent. Portland's development commission has evolved to be more in tune with setting the objectives and then letting private developers take the lead in urban renewal projects rather than being the financial institution providing the funding.

Perhaps our PDC needs to get away from being a bank/foundation giving out loans and grants. Follow Portland's lead and act more as an advisory commission.

If you've ever attended a PDC meeting, you'll find that although they are supposed to be the driving force of the Urban Renewal District, which encompasses the majority of the city south of the river and north of the railroad tracks, but the conversation rarely strays from the downtown area.

Now the PDC is promoting the idea of a "food hub," a food distribution center with a commercial kitchen, and a "festival area." CAPECO has a food warehouse with, I believe, a commercial kitchen. The city has commercial kitchens in the rec center and the

convention center.

The school district has just finished a new kitchen at the West Hills Technical Center. Do we really need another? What's wrong with using the convention center or Roy Raley Park for a "festival area?" Why not use the assets we have?

We have a committee/commission for everything imaginable. My critics would counter that they are comprised of volunteers costing nothing, yet they basically all have their hands out asking for funding for one project or another, distracting our new mayor from achieving those objectives proposed in his agenda supported by input by the public.

The city manager hit the nail on the head when he said that we "need to keep our eyes on the ball," "people are stretched thin," and "we have to make sure we're doing everything we can to be as efficient as possible and not spending money on things we shouldn't be spending money on."

It's time to focus on getting water and power, both gas and electric to the commercial property along the "Road to Nowhere" and finish the project instead of installing an irrigation system for street trees and flowerpots.

Rick Rohde
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

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