

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## OUR VIEW

# How best to spend \$397,000

Last week, this newspaper reported on a meeting of the Umatilla Special Transportation Advisory Committee.

It's not often that the actions of such volunteer committees make the front page of the *East Oregonian*, but this one did. That's because the committee had \$397,000 in cigarette tax dollars and no guidelines for how to disperse it.

Hermiston assistant city manager Mark Morgan described the county's plan as "throw a sack of money on the table" and let the committee do with it what they want. So they did. But the committee did not weigh the merits of the numerous groups requesting funds, tally what services they offer, nor hold them accountable for holding up those services.

They used a simple formula and recommended each applicant receive the same percentage of their total ask.

There is the additional problem that two of the three committee members are affiliated with organizations who received money directly from the fund. While those members — Darrin Umbarger of Clearview Meditation and

Virginia Beebe of the Hermiston Senior Center — each abstained from voting on grants to their organizations, the possibility of quid pro quo is clear.

We don't impugn the characters of these two people, who are clearly knowledgeable about transportation issues for the disabled and elderly in the county, and give of their time to serve the committee. But we do think there should be at least one step between their asking and their receiving.

This is, after all, is just an advisory committee. Umatilla County Commissioners have the final say on where the funds go, and they have the ability to disband the committee or back its recommendations.

We do think the commissioners should take a more active role in the matter, because the budget is so large and some county residents are very reliant on affordable and reliable transportation services. The commissioners should come up with an equitable formula to try to use the dollars as efficiently as possible, rewarding municipalities and nonprofits who do the most and have the greatest need.

The county's plan was described as "throw a sack of money on the table."

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

### A nonpartisan secretary of state

The Bend Bulletin

Dennis Richardson, Oregon's secretary of state, wants the Legislature to make his office a nonpartisan one. There are good reasons for making the shift.

The Secretary of State's Office is part of the executive branch of Oregon government. The state constitution requires it to act as record keeper for both the Legislature and executive branch, to act as the state's auditor of public accounts and to keep the state seal. In theory, at least, there's no room for politics in any of those jobs. The secretary of state also plays a key role in redistricting, redrawing the boundary lines for political districts. That's where Oregonians definitely want a less partisan person in charge.

Yet, as Phil Keisling, a former Oregon secretary of state, and Sam Reed, a former secretary of state in Washington state, wrote for the *Governing* website a couple of years ago, the race for the job, if not the job

itself, has become increasingly political in the last 40 years.

As that has happened, the cost of running for the office has risen dramatically, according to Keisling and Reed. In Oregon in 2016, Democrat Brad Avakian had \$2.3 million at his disposal for the campaign, while Republican Richardson had \$1.66 million. A nonpartisan office might be less attractive for politicians whose real goal is to run for governor.

Meanwhile, given the nature of the secretary of state's job, a partisan office holder put in place after a partisan race could be viewed as taking partisan positions once he or she is elected.

Oregonians need to know that elections, which are overseen by the secretary of state's office, are on the up and up. If they believe the office holder is acting unfairly where candidates of the opposition party are concerned, they cannot trust the outcome of elections.

Richardson hopes to persuade lawmakers to approve the change. They should do so.

## OTHER VIEWS



## What did Trump know and when did he know it?

During the Watergate scandal, until now the most outrageous political scandal in American history, the crucial question was drawn by Sen. Howard Baker of Tennessee: "What did the president know, and when did he know it?"

Today the question is the same.

This is not about Mike Flynn. It is about the president who appointed him, who earlier considered Flynn for vice president. The latest revelation of frequent contacts between the Trump team and Russian intelligence should be a wake-up call to Republicans as well as Democrats.

When Vice President Mike Pence was asked by Chris Wallace of Fox News on Jan. 15 if there had been any contacts between the Trump campaign and the Kremlin, he answered: "Of course not. Why would there be any contacts?"

Great question, Mr. Vice President.

Look, there's a great deal we don't know, but Russian interference in our election is potentially a bigger scandal than Watergate ever was. Watergate didn't change an election's result — President Richard Nixon would have won anyway in 1972 — while the 2016 election was close enough that Russian interference might have tipped the balance.

We don't know whether the Russians had domestic help in their effort to steal the U.S. election, but here are a few dots that are begging to be connected:

First, the American intelligence community agrees that the Kremlin interfered during the campaign in an attempt to help Donald Trump. This isn't a single agency's conclusion but reportedly a "strong consensus" among the CIA, the FBI and the director of national intelligence.

Second, the dossier prepared by a former MI6 Russia expert outlines collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia. CNN reports that American intelligence has communications intercepts corroborating elements of the dossier, and the latest revelation of repeated and constant contacts between the Kremlin and the Trump campaign give additional weight to the dossier's allegations — although it's also important to note that officials told *The Times* that they had seen no evidence of such cooperation in election manipulation.

Third, President Trump has been mystifyingly friendly toward Russia and President Vladimir Putin. As Jeffrey H. Smith, a former general counsel to the CIA, puts it: "The bigger issue here is why Trump and people around him take such a radically different view of Russia than has been the case for decades. We don't know the answer to that."

Fourth, Flynn, before taking office, discussed Obama administration sanctions on Russia with the Russian ambassador. Flynn has now resigned, but he was steeped in the

principle of a chain of command; I doubt he made these calls completely on his own.

Daniel Benjamin, a former counterterrorism coordinator at the State Department who has known Flynn for years, says it would have been out of character for Flynn to do so. So who told Flynn to make these calls? Steve Bannon? Trump himself?

We're back to our question: What did the president know, and when did he know it?

The White House hasn't responded to my inquiries, and Trump lashes out wildly at "the fake news media" without answering questions. He reminds me of Nixon, who in 1974 said Watergate "would have been a blip" if it weren't for journalists "who hate my guts." Soon afterward, Nixon resigned.

Trump supporters say that the real scandal here is leaks that make the administration look bad.

A bit hypocritical? It's dizzying to see a president who celebrated the hacking of his rival's campaign emails suddenly evince alarm about leaks.

Sure, leaks are always a concern, but they pale beside the larger issues of the integrity of our leaders and our elections. Published reports have quoted people in the intelligence community as fearing that information given to the White House will end up in Russian hands, even that the "Kremlin has ears" in the White House Situation Room.

I referred to Trump last year as "the Russian poodle," and we've known for years of Trump's financial ties to Russia, with his son Donald Jr. saying in 2008, "We see a lot of money pouring in from Russia."

It's all the more important now that Trump release his tax returns so that we can understand any financial leverage Russia has over him. Yet the same Republicans who oversaw eight investigations of Benghazi shrug at far greater concerns involving Trump and Russia.

"I'm just appalled at how little people seem to care about the fact that Russians interfered in our presidential election, clearly, unequivocally, on the part of one candidate," Michael McFaul, a former ambassador to Russia, told me. "What's more important than that?" To which I add: Only one thing could be more important — if the Russians had help from within the U.S.

As I said, there's a great deal we don't know. But we urgently need a bipartisan investigation, ideally an independent panel modeled on the 9/11 Commission. It must address what is now the central question: "What did the president know, and when did he know it?"

Nicholas Kristof grew up on a sheep and cherry farm in Yamhill. A columnist for *The New York Times* since 2001, he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1990 and 2006.

## YOUR VIEWS

### Could electoral college work in Oregon?

Our founders, in their infinite wisdom, created the Electoral College to ensure the states were fairly represented. Why should one or two densely populated areas speak for the whole of the nation?

The following list of statistics should finally put an end to the argument as to why the Electoral College makes sense.

1. Trump won 2,623 U.S. counties. Clinton won 489.

2. There are 62 counties in New York State. Trump won 46 of them.

3. Clinton won the popular vote by almost 2 million votes.

Where? New York City consists of Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Richmond and Queens where Clinton received well over 2 million more votes than Trump.

Therefore NYC more than accounted for Clinton winning the popular vote of the entire country.

4. NYC and immediate area comprise 319 square miles. The United States is comprised of 3,797,000 square miles.

When you have a country that encompasses almost 4 million square miles of territory, it would be ludicrous to even suggest that the

vote of those who inhabit a mere 319 square miles should dictate the outcome of a national election.

Large, densely-populated Democratic cities (NYC, Chicago, LA, etc.) don't and shouldn't speak for the rest of our country.

How could the electoral college system work within a state to make the vote fair? Urban areas have the population but not the majority of land. Oregon is not unique in the U.S. In fact, most states face the same issues, which are "rural" verses "urban."

One thought would be for each Oregon state senator and representative to have one electoral vote. Since the majority of legislators from both houses are residents in urban areas, would anything change?

If Oregon has the electoral college system, would past votes have come to a different result? I challenge anyone with more mathematical knowledge and the time to take an issue or two using the past vote and see if rural vote would have made a difference.

Below are some basic facts: The state is 98,381 square miles of land. There are 36 counties with a total population of 4,028,977 residents.

Recent elections show votes as:

- Rural, 28 counties: 87,094 square miles or 88.8 percent with 19.6 people per acre (1,705,160 or 42.3 percent of population.)
- Urban, 8 counties: 11,287 square miles or 11.4 percent with 205.9 people per acre (2,323,977 57.7 percent of population.)

Ken Parsons  
La Grande

### Trump the one spreading falsehoods

In response to Ron Linn's letter: I have to wonder if he ever takes the time to re-read what he put into quotes in his calling for an end to the democrats' temper tantrum.

A falsehood gaining credence? Who specializes in that better than Trump? His repeated statements about voter fraud without a shred of evidence, his claim that he saw thousands of Muslims celebrating after 9/11, that Hillary Clinton would allow six hundred million illegal immigrants into the U.S.A. in her first week in office, claiming he was never in favor of going into Iraq, saying he would repeal Obamacare on his first day in office?

The lies and repeat of lies have obviously gained credence with

you, Mr. Linn. As for the rest of us temper tantrum throwers, we're amateurs compared to the eight-year tantrum you Republicans threw during the Obama presidency.

By the way, I'm proud of your granddaughters, too.

David Gracia  
Hermiston

### Oregon headed down the path of no return

We have been ruled by ambitious hypocrites for the last 30 years. That goes to all the way down to many cities. Ego and political ambition trumped national security for too many elected officials. The only morality that liberals know is what will further their own cause. President Donald Trump is not a politician.

Oregon is going to tax us to death and still go bankrupt. Oregon is either corrupt, incompetent or both.

Every day I read the Oregon State Library newspaper articles from different cities and there is not week that goes by that there isn't

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. Send letters to 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.

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