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OUR VIEW

Richardson's pursuit of accountability

When Oregonians elected their first Republican to a statewide office in nearly two decades, they were looking for accountability.

Frustrated by the hundreds of millions of dollars squandered on failed projects like Cover Oregon and the Columbia River Crossing, and still stinging from watching their governor resign in disgrace, they elected Dennis Richardson as Secretary of State to provide a check on Democrats running the state.

As newspaper endorsements of Richardson last fall noted, Oregon's Secretary of State

is an administrator, not a policy-maker. The job includes overseeing elections, auditing state agencies, keeping a registry of businesses and maintaining the state's archives.

While Richardson's Democratic challenger promised to use the office to promote partisan interests like abortion protections, Richardson promised to focus on nonpartisan issues that are actually in the Secretary of State's job description, like reducing waste and fraud. Those promises won over even Portland Democrats like the *Willamette Week* editorial board, which noted their strong disagreements with him on social issues but endorsed him as a politician " beholden to none of the special interests that rule the state."

It is important Richardson remember that mandate.

So far, news coming out of his office is in line with promises he made. An audit his office released earlier this month, for example, found that 69 percent of Oregon Department of Transportation construction projects from 2011 to 2015 exceeded their bid amounts. The report suggests the department could save significant money by tracking "unbalanced" line items, a strategy the audit found contractors often use to more than double the price on materials they think ODOT underestimated the need for.

That's one of the most valuable services Richardson's office can and should provide for our state — data on wasteful spending paired with

suggestions to reduce that waste. As our legislature works to fill a \$1.6 billion budget deficit this year, we would rather see them cut inefficient practices than valuable assets like the Oregon State Police crime lab in Pendleton.

Beyond looking at budgets, Richardson must also focus on helping change poor performance by state departments. He took a much-needed step in that direction by pushing state auditors to begin an audit of the state's foster care program.

News about the Department of Human Services' handling of child welfare has often been dismal, including a recent internal review that found in 47 percent of cases the consultant conducting the review disagreed with the case worker's assessment that the child was safe. Changes need to happen — soon — and as a former foster parent himself, Richardson is in a good position to help Oregon's children get the protection they deserve from abusive and dangerous situations.

On the other hand, he spent time recently meeting with members of President Donald Trump's cabinet while in Washington, D.C., for a conference. While building bridges is an important part of politics, the U.S. Secretary of Energy does not have much to do with the Oregon Secretary of State's job duties.

As the Secretary of State's office transitions from projects started by Richardson's predecessors into projects that Richardson himself has initiated, he should prioritize actions that will hold state leaders and departments accountable, spotlight ways to reduce waste and maintain confidence in the integrity of our electoral process.

All the audits in the world will only go so far, however, if Democrats in power dismiss the findings as merely the work of a member of the opposition party and don't implement the suggestions. Richardson was elected for a reason. Both he and the state leaders he is expected to hold accountable would do well to keep that in mind going forward.

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.



" PSSST! IT'S ME. CHAIRMAN NUNES. NO ONE HAS FOLLOWED ME TO THIS POINT."

OTHER VIEWS

Whatever Trump does next, it has to be about jobs, wages

What will President Trump do after the Obamacare debacle? For 48 hours, some Hill Republicans — and Trump himself — spoke as if the president and the GOP could smoothly, seamlessly and swiftly pivot to tax reform. Then, Monday night, came an Axios report that Trump might choose to pursue an infrastructure bill — the only measure with even a hope of some Democratic support — at the same time as tax reform.

Whatever the final decision, Trump and Hill Republicans are in danger of failing again if they do not direct their every action toward the creation of jobs and an increase in wages. That's why Trump won the presidency, and it is what voters expect of him.

"Trump and Republicans have two big numbers that are the measurements of success," says a GOP pollster and strategist involved with the efforts on Capitol Hill. "One is how many jobs are created. Two is how much wages go up. He has to have both of them."

Democrats often point to the number of jobs created in the eight years after Barack Obama took office amid an economic meltdown. Unemployment, which hit 10 percent in October 2009, is now 4.7 percent. But median household income is less than it was 10 years ago. People who are working don't feel they have much chance of a raise or of finding a better-paying job. That is why it is important for Trump not only to help create jobs but also raise wages.

In its most recent poll — the one that found Trump's job approval rating at 37 percent — Quinnipiac asked 1,056 registered voters this question: "Do you think the nation's economy is getting better, getting worse, or staying about the same?"

Forty percent said the economy is improving — not a terrible number, especially when just 16 percent said the economy is getting worse. Perhaps the more alarming figure is that 39 percent said they believe the economy is staying about the same.

"Since (the economy) is bad now, saying things are the same is pessimistic," notes the GOP pollster. In other words, when voters say the economy is the same, they often mean it's still bad.

Men tend to say the economy is doing a little better — 50 percent told Quinnipiac it is improving. But just 32 percent of women said

the economy is getting better, while 20 percent said it is getting worse and 44 percent said it is the same. If one takes those "same" answers as "it's still bad," that's 64 percent who are dissatisfied with the way things are going.

That is why Trump won last November. Yes, other issues — immigration, terrorism, Clinton fatigue — played a role, but the most basic reason Trump is president is because a lot of voters believed a change was needed to improve the economy.

To give perhaps an extreme example: This week the *South Bend (Indiana) Tribune* reported that a local restaurant owner, an illegal immigrant from Mexico who has been in the United States for nearly 20 years and has no criminal record, might be deported. His wife, a naturalized U.S. citizen, voted for Trump and is now stunned at what has happened, having believed only "bad hombres" would be deported under the Trump administration. When the *Tribune* asked why she supported Trump, she answered, "I did it for the economy. We needed a change."

The new president took some early actions to address those concerns — the Carrier deal, executive orders killing the Trans-Pacific Partnership and cutting federal regulations on business. But the first big legislative item Trump pursued was to repeal and replace Obamacare.

One problem mostly unremarked at the time was that Trump didn't even try to sell Obamacare replacement as a measure to increase jobs and wages. In his March 20 speech in Louisville, for example, Trump not only did not frame Obamacare as a jobs and wages issue, he didn't even try very hard to portray it as a cost-of-living issue, offering only a few sentences on rising premiums and not once uttering the word "deductible." Obamacare repeal and replacement, as Trump presented it, was just something that had to be done before moving on to the fun stuff, which was tax reform.

Now Trump is in fact moving on, to tax reform, or maybe to tax reform and infrastructure. Both are more obviously jobs and wages issues than Obamacare. If he wants to succeed, that's how Trump must shape and sell the legislation — and his entire presidency.

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



BYRON YORK
Comment

YOUR VIEWS

Drug court closed reluctantly due to budget cuts

The Umatilla County Local Public Safety Coordinating Council (LPSCC) is the entity responsible for making decisions about the viability of Umatilla County Drug Court. LPSCC implemented drug court 10 years ago, and is solely responsible for the decision to end the current intensive drug court model, which directs those on formal probation with severe drug addiction to an extensive treatment and supervision program where the court and drug court team regularly assess and determine approaches to individual drug abuse.

The decision to end the current drug court model in Umatilla County was made by LPSCC with regret and reluctance upon release of the governor's proposed budget, which cuts funding to public safety as well as many other county services, and subsequently creates a \$516,000 deficit in the budget of the current drug court program. That \$516,000 budget deficit was the only reason for LPSCC's decision.

The LPSCC discussion was arduous, with no member in favor of cutting drug court and walking away from the effort or the clients. The action of LPSCC was to cease drug court operations under the current model with specific instruction to LPSCC's Justice Reinvestment Subcommittee to research and evaluate alternative methods to provide drug court under a less costly model. That subcommittee meets in April and already has made efforts to find supportive funding for the drug court program in a modified format.

Finally, the action taken by LPSCC to cease drug court included provision to transition the current clients of drug court to enable them continued access to the services they receive through drug court, albeit not under the auspices of the court, but services nonetheless.

LPSCC meets the second Tuesday of each

month at the Umatilla County Courthouse. The public is welcome to attend.

Susan McHenry, chair
Umatilla County LPSCC
Pendleton

Don't forget who supported ACA repeal

The failed effort to "repeal and replace" the Affordable Care Act would have taken away health care coverage from 24 million Americans if the bill had passed. The bill failed because 100 percent of Democratic congressional representatives were opposed to these devastating outcomes, while small minorities of Republican congressional representatives either thought the outcomes were a little too onerous or thought these outcomes would not be hurtful enough.

Keep in mind, however, that the vast majority of Republican congressional representatives, including our own Representative Greg Walden, one of the chief architects of this harmful bill, believed that taking away healthcare coverage from 24 million Americans was the right thing to do. Keep these facts in mind the next time you vote.

Chris Pilotti
Hermiston

New schools lead to growth

As lead county commissioner for economic development matters in Umatilla County, let me add some perspective to the discussion regarding the 2017 Hermiston School Bond Measure.

Schools are an important consideration for new companies in their consideration of sitting in our communities. Potential employers are concerned because schools affect quality of life for families of workers they will employ. Aging facilities with overcrowded classrooms are a negative in the siting process.

No one likes paying higher taxes. My

efforts in economic development are to help bring economic growth to our communities to help "flatten" tax increases. Businesses pay property taxes on their business property; their employees live in homes that generate property taxes; both produce "spin-off" prosperity to a community. Growth means more taxpayers to help absorb the cost of services provided by taxes including schools.

I support growth; I support the 2017 Hermiston School Bond.

Bill Elfering
Hermiston

Forward or reverse?

The city of Pendleton and property owners have spent a considerable amount of money in an attempt to improve the looks and atmosphere of our downtown area by removing overhead power lines and gas meters, replacing sidewalks and installing turn-of-the-century lighting with banner stanchions attached for advertising. Unfortunately, though the historic district encompasses more than just Main Street, the effort seems to have stopped there. The failure of the tree program by selecting unsuitable varieties and improper installation, which in turn ruined those new sidewalks, didn't help.

Now, a member of the Downtown Business Association has proposed substituting a surface-mounted irrigation system to water new trees and flower baskets as a replacement for those unsightly overhead electric lines and gas meters in an effort to lure shoppers to the downtown area. The

stumbling block appears to be funding, and that's where you taxpayers come in.

At a recent event, a prominent member of the Downtown Business Association was rumored to have approached a member of our city council requesting tax money for the project. Perhaps a better solution would be to replace the broken or missing banner stanchions and thus provide a venue for advertising events other than just the Round-Up. Colorful banners would spruce things up, advertise events, and wouldn't even require any city water, plumbing or electricity.

If you've been to Athena since their downtown street was replaced, you would also notice antique-looking purpose-built poles were installed to display cross-street banners, and they've removed sidewalk-damaging trees. Locally we still tie cross-street banners to trees, building hooks, or whatever is handy. I do have to hand it to the city for keeping most of those nice street lights working this winter despite the harsh conditions. That's a welcome change.

The city manager stated in a recent news release that since the Convention Center is now operating in the black, we can afford to hire a full-time manager. I sent an inquiry to one of my city council representatives asking if this means taxpayer funding is no longer needed to support the center. I received no reply. Interesting — I guess this means another boost in our unfunded PERS liability.

Rick Rohde
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

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. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to managing editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.