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OTHER VIEWS

Kitzhaber cleared of criminal action, not vindicated

The Oregonian/OregonLive

No matter how he would like to twist the narrative, the rise and fall of John Kitzhaber lies squarely on his shoulders.

News came this month that the U.S. Department of Justice had decided against filing criminal charges against the former governor or his fiancée, Cylvia Hayes. The decision brought a merciful end to a 28-month investigation by four federal agencies into whether the couple used their high-profile public positions for personal benefit.

The ordeal cast a shadow over the state as well as many of the public servants who had worked loyally for the governor for years. Lawmakers have worked with varying success over the past two years to draft ethics and public records laws to address problems highlighted in the downfall of the man once considered one of Oregon's most durable politicians.

Kitzhaber claims he's been vindicated. He hasn't.

The federal prosecutor didn't set out to decide whether the actions of the former governor and first lady passed the smell test. The prosecutor focused only on whether their actions violated the law. The decision simply tells us that their conduct, while dishonest and self-serving, fell short of being criminal.

Criminality was a high bar to begin with, but it was made even higher just one year into the Kitzhaber investigation, when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the public corruption convictions of former Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell and his wife for insufficient evidence that the money and gifts they accepted led to "official action."

The fact remains that Kitzhaber failed to address the conflicts of interest created when Hayes' consulting contracts, which totaled about \$200,000, began overlapping her policy work in his office.

Taxpayers would be well served

if findings from the investigation are provided to the Oregon Government Ethics Commission, which announced this week it will resume its long-delayed review into ethics complaints filed by Republicans. Hopefully that review can provide more answers that can shape the ethics reforms still needed in Oregon.

For now, unfortunately, Kitzhaber is choosing his own translation of the federal prosecutor's brief statement. He's a victim of the media. A guinea pig for fake news. It all sounds rather Trumpian. And like the drumbeat of strained logic we see inside the Beltway these days, Kitzhaber is spinning an overly simplistic and revisionist storyline by attempting to categorize this as a war between him and the media.

It's a disingenuous strategy that takes away from his correct decision in 2015 to resign. The Oregonian/OregonLive Editorial Board had called for that move not because of any criminality, but because at that moment in time he had become a source of unending distraction and could no longer lead the state effectively.

Kitzhaber did not resign because he lost control of a "media frenzy."

No, in the years leading up to the scandal he had lost control of his own office and failed to put clear boundaries on his fiancée's fast expanding role within it. He had lost sight of his duty to provide answers Oregonians deserved when his office failed to provide public records before he was elected to his historic — and historically short — fourth term.

Most damaging, Kitzhaber had lost the trust and support of longtime colleagues and political leaders who were encouraging him to go.

Some Oregonians may agree with Kitzhaber's misguided analysis. Others still feel burned. But by blaming anyone else for what played out in 2015, Kitzhaber only undermines the potential for him to earn back that trust.



OTHER VIEWS

Want to clean up Hanford? Finish Yucca Mountain

Nuclear energy has played an integral role in generating electricity in the United States for decades. This reliable energy source is responsible for generating 20 percent of electricity across the country, providing low-cost power for consumers throughout the United States. In 2016, 30 states operated nuclear reactors for electricity and six of those states relied on nuclear power for the majority of their electricity generation.

Importantly, nuclear energy produces zero greenhouse gas emissions. According to the Nuclear Energy Institute, 553 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions were avoided by the nuclear industry throughout the United States — making it one of the cleanest forms of energy in the country.

Nuclear energy is a clean and efficient part of our nation's overall energy mix and it supports our national defense priorities. However, the federal government has dropped the ball when it comes to disposing of the necessary byproduct of nuclear activities — spent nuclear fuel from commercially generated nuclear power and high-level waste from our nation's defense activities. As a result, spent nuclear fuel currently sits idle in 121 communities and 39 states across the country, creating significant potential environmental concerns.

The Hanford Site, located about 40 miles north of my district on the Columbia River in Washington State, produced plutonium for nuclear weapons for over 40 years for America's defense program. Since the creation of the Manhattan Project, the federal government has been responsible for cleaning up high-level radioactive waste from sites across the country like Hanford that are storing the waste from our nation's nuclear weapons development and the spent fuel generated from our navy's nuclear submarine and aircraft carrier propulsion systems.

The Hanford site was deactivated in 1987 and in 1989 the Department of Energy's mission to clean up the waste began. Twenty-eight years later, 2,300 tons of spent nuclear fuel remains at the site in dry storage and millions of gallons of high-level waste awaits disposal. The recent cave-in at Hanford is just the latest cause for concern. While nobody was injured and there has been no evidence of contamination, it doesn't take away the fact that this material clearly needs to be moved to a permanent disposal facility.

The waste currently sitting at the Hanford site is engineered by design to be sent to the Yucca Mountain permanent geological repository facility in the Nevada desert. Yucca Mountain was chosen by Congress in 1987 to house both spent nuclear fuel and the kind of high-level waste found at Hanford. At Yucca



GREG WALDEN
Comment

Mountain, these materials would be safely isolated 1,000 feet underground. In fact, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission determined that the site could safely store this nuclear material for one million years.

Oregon ratepayers, through a fee tied to the electricity generated from nuclear energy, have already paid the Department of Energy over \$160 million to finance the costs associated with the development of a permanent repository to dispose of spent nuclear fuel. Washingtonians have paid an additional \$872 million in this effort. All told, taxpayers around the country have paid more than \$40 billion to permanently dispose of spent nuclear fuel and the high-level nuclear waste like that found at Hanford.

Despite the safety and environmental benefits and billions of dollars taxpayers and ratepayers across the country have already invested, the Obama administration halted Yucca Mountain from moving forward and tried to permanently prevent the project from being completed.

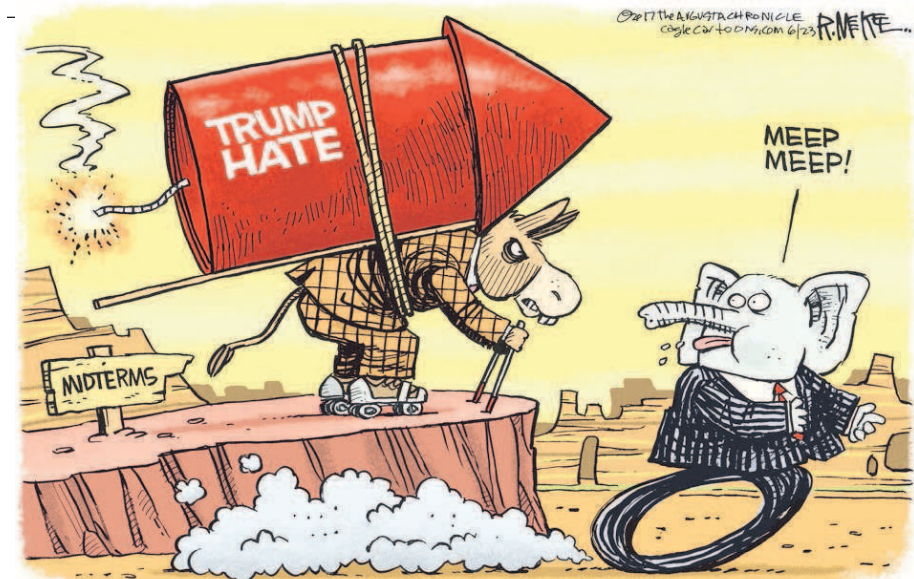
As chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee, I've directed our team to address these problems. We've done our homework too. Dating back to 2011, the committee has conducted rigorous oversight, held several hearings examining all aspects of nuclear waste policy, and some of our members even traveled to Yucca Mountain for a first-hand look at the geologic repository. Now it's time to act.

Our resulting legislation, the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act of 2017, recognizes that Yucca Mountain is the most expeditious pathway for communities around the country that store defense high-level waste — like the Hanford Site — to dispose of that waste. The bill reinstates Yucca Mountain as the cornerstone of our nuclear waste disposal while also allowing private interim storage projects to move forward for the first time — a concept that would temporarily hold commercial nuclear waste until Yucca Mountain is ready to receive shipments.

The recent incident at Hanford could have been a lot worse. It's time for the Department of Energy to fulfill their legal obligation to dispose of this waste to assure nothing worse happens. Thankfully, we're working towards a durable solution at the Energy and Commerce Committee and rest assured, we will get this waste consolidated and safely stored in its permanent home in Yucca Mountain.

Rep. Greg Walden (R-Hood River), chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, represents Oregon's second congressional district, which includes 20 counties in central, southern and eastern Oregon.

Columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.



YOUR VIEWS

Investigation must be honest

In response to growing political pressure, it's difficult to know just how former FBI Director Robert Mueller, the special prosecutor, will determine in investigating into whether or not Russia interfered in the Trump election campaign.

FBI Director James Comey says Trump privately asked him to shut down the federal investigation into Michael Flynn, Trump's former national security adviser. We have no reason to believe Mr. Comey would lie.

Mr. Flynn did admit he failed to disclose payments from Russia and Turkey when he reapplied for a security clearance last year. Heads of the Oversight Committee say Flynn, a retired lieutenant general, did not get permission from the Pentagon, nor from the State Department before accepting \$45,000 in speaking fees from the Kremlin-funded news network RT, and more than \$500,000 for lobbying work that may have benefited Turkey.

Flynn has offered to testify before the House and Senate intelligence committees, but only in exchange for immunity. To seek immunity in this regard does raise questions of vulnerability. Mr. Mueller can look into Mr. Flynn's business arrangements with Russia, Turkey, and other places. We find that government investigations tend to expand, rather than contract.

The firing of Mr. Comey has ignited more questions where earlier congressional investigations might have devoted their

attention to the Russian interference which is the most serious issue of the whole business.

The most "We the people" can do is hope for the honesty of our politicians.

Dr. Dorys C. Grover
Pendleton

Political witch hunts must end

My grandmother used to caution "you reap what you sow."

A segment of our people has become lawless and out-of-control in their opposition to the current elected administration. They are, in part, being pawns to the overall game plan of the Democratic Party to obstruct and unseat the Trump administration.

"PHD think tank" people are crafting this anti-Trump game plan and it is spiraling out of control — not to their disliking. The constant barrage of negativity has sown itself into a portion of our people who act out in extreme.

We must heal this wounding as the consequence is becoming unbearable. It will only be stopped when the DNC stops the attacks and works to find common ground to move the nation forward. Let's put our energies into the good things that are happening and stop giving oxygen to these witch hunts. This is getting dangerously out of control like we have "lost our moral compass!"

Ron Linn
Stanfield

Rivoli a long work in progress, will be good for Pendleton

I read Mr. Rohde's diatribe on how the city fooled their money away when they approved a grant to the Rivoli Theater project and just steamed. I proposed revitalization of the Rivoli Theater 18 years ago because I had seen what happened to Astoria when they revitalized the Liberty Theater. I saw what happened when the Elgin Opera House is running and I saw the need for a small venue for things like a rock and roll concert or a Bach concert or someone like R. Carlos Nakai to come and play his Native American flute.

I also saw the need to preserve the old Peterson/Matlock Theater because at one time that theater's stage had some of the most well-known vaudeville stars in the business on it. It went from showing silent films with an orchestra to showing things as James Bond and "South Pacific."

Anyone who knows about sales and marketing knows that if there is an event at the Rivoli that every restaurant on Main

street will benefit. We also know that those events also draw people from out of town who stay in our motels, buy our gas and perhaps buy clothes from the local clothing stores.

All you, Mr. Rohde, think of is the now cost, not the later benefits. If you hate Pendleton so much I suggest that you think about moving because it is short-sighted attitudes like yours that has led to little or no land being available for new industry to come to Pendleton. That same attitude has led to the lack of land to build new housing on that is within the city limits and it is short-sighted attitudes like yours that have caused Pendleton to stagnate while the rest of Oregon grows.

I want to see the Rivoli come back to life and be the cornerstone of a lively arts and music scene in Pendleton, but with people like you complaining every time a nickel is spent on something that isn't your idea that it will take forever to happen.

Barbara Wright
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.