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OUR VIEW

Bounds and determined

It's exciting to think that a Hermiston High School graduate with strong Eastern Oregon connections could soon be sitting on the powerful, San Francisco-based Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Ryan Bounds' nomination to that court by President Donald Trump brings with it a dash of hometown pride, but also a belief that Bounds might be a more knowledgeable judge on issues that matter to rural Americans.

> No majority lasts forever. Political parties change judicial nomination rules at their own peril.

His résumé leaves nothing to be desired. After graduating from Hermiston he earned degrees from Stanford and Yale, practiced commercial law in Portland, then took jobs with the U.S. Department of Justice and served as special assistant to the President for domestic policy, then became a federal prosecutor. He is currently the Assistant United States Attorney for the District of Oregon.

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden (R-Ore.), wrote in an op-ed in this newspaper that Bounds' "commitment to the rule of law, liberty and self-government are, in my mind, beyond question." For the notoriously liberal West Coast court, he's the kind of voice we expect would add some balance.

However, Oregon's two senators (both Democrats) announced that they would try to block Bounds' nomination, "or any other nominee that has not been selected through our judicial process." Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden have threatened to not turn in their "blue slip" and scuttle the nomination.

First, what the heck is a "blue slip?"

According to beltway paper *The Hill*, "blue slips" are not an in-the-books Senate rule, but more of a longstanding tradition enforced by the Judiciary Committee chairman. The blue slips — actual slips of blue-colored paper — allow home-state senators to sign off on a judicial nominee before the committee holds a nomination hearing.

By not returning the paper, those same home-state senators can block any nominee they please.

In a letter to White House Counsel Don McGahn on Sept. 7, Merkley and Wyden wrote "unfortunately it is now apparent that you never intended to allow our longstanding process to play out. Instead, you have demonstrated that you were only interested in our input if we were willing to preapprove your preferred nominees ... disregarding this Oregon tradition returns us to the days of nepotism and patronage that harmed our courts and placed unfit judges on the bench."

The reason home-state senators have blue-slip power is so they can easily scuttle extremist choices, and force those who nominate judges to choose candidates that garner bipartisan support.

Recently, however, the blue slips are being used in a hyper-partisan manner. That was the case when Republicans stopped Democratic nominees while Obama held office — and the tables have turned now. Democrats, despite Republican obstructionism, kept the rule in place. Republicans now want to narrow the rule, so their appointments (especially of circuit court judges) are harder to derail. It's the same type of rule that allowed Republicans to stop Merrick Garland from having a hearing for a seat on the Supreme Court, which the GOP sidestepped to instead confirm Neil Gorsuch.

"My personal view is that the blue slip, with regard to circuit court appointments, ought to simply be a notification of how you're going to vote, not the opportunity to blackball," U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell (R—Ky.) told *The New York Times* earlier this week.

The push is toward even more extreme, politicized judges. Either side changes the rules at their own peril — no majority lasts forever and what may be to your short-term benefit could be to your (and the nation's) long-term detriment.

Bounds is eminently qualified for the Ninth Circuit. But no nominee for such an important post should just be tapped on the shoulder and shown their seat. Let Bounds be judged by a customary bipartisan nominating committee, have his résumé and judicial decision making tested and analyzed. That way, when he does make it to the Ninth Circuit Court, he will bring public trust to the judiciary.

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

Donald Trump has changed his mind — a heck of a lot

GAIL COLLINS
Comment

Wow, Donald Trump really is all over the place.

On Tuesday he had dinner with a few moderate Democrats and completely retooled his tax policy before dessert. This is the man who is having such a famous fling with the minority leaders, Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi, that they no longer need identifying. Really, "Chuck and Nancy" are as famous as Beyoncé and Jay-Z. Victoria and Albert. Antony and Cleopatra.

But about the tax policy dinner. The Democratic senators described their discussion as so harmonious it sounded ... kind of boring. "Very collegial and very businesslike," Sen. Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota said on a radio interview back home with talk show host Joel Heitkamp. (Yes, they're siblings. North Dakota is a very small state. Only 750,000 people. Yet as many senators as California or New York. Do you think that's fair? Never mind, I digress.)

> The only actual written-down Trump tax plan is a one-pager that includes what Sen. Ron Wyden calls a new "lunar-crater-size loophole."

Democrats have been demanding that no tax cuts go to the wealthy, and over beef medallions, Trump gave the impression that was exactly what he wanted, too. Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia reported that "the president was adamant from the get-go: 'This is not a tax cut for the rich, and I repeat that, this will not be a tax cut for me or any rich people.' That kind of started off the conversation and it went pretty good from there."

Now Manchin and Heitkamp are two of the most conservative senators from their party. But still, this seems like an awful lot of agreeing. Trump has spent the last month howling about the need to cut the corporate tax rate in half, and he's been adamant about getting rid of the estate tax, which is imposed only on inheritances of more than $5 million.

Do you think he's changed his mind? That the Democrats misheard? That the spinach was spiked with hallucinogens?

No, on Wednesday Trump not only ditched his tax-cuts-for-the-wealthy plans, he claimed the rich might take a hit. "If they have to go higher they'll go higher," he told a bipartisan congressional group with the adorable name of the Problem Solvers Caucus. This seemed like good news except for the part about the president appearing to be sort of off his rocker.

The only actual written-down Trump tax plan is a one-pager that includes what Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon, the top Democrat on the Finance Committee, calls a new "lunar-crater-size loophole" on income for the wealthy. Plus the corporate tax cuts and the estate tax repeal.

Hard to know when there will be something more substantial, with all this presidential hopping around. The Republicans claim they'll have a real tax bill done soon. A while back, National Economic Council Director Gary Cohn promised a detailed version would be done "by the end of the summer." I guess if you wanted to be stupendously technical, that could mean they've still got until next week, when the autumnal equinox occurs as the sun crosses the celestial equator. Perhaps the president will watch it happen, shielding his eyes with a new two-page bill.

It's ironic that an administration so money-centric has so many inept Cabinet members handling financial policy. Even in a group full of negative star power, Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin stands out. Last week, when the Republicans were angrily reacting to the Trump-Democrat deal on raising the debt limit, he asked the irate legislators to do it "for me." This plea went over well in the sense that nobody actually pummeled Mnuchin with tomatoes.

Still, Trump is ready to roll. Details, schmeetails. "With Irma and Harvey devastation, Tax Cuts and Tax Reform is needed more than ever before," he tweeted. "Go Congress, go!" Negative thinkers pointed out that the hurricane devastation required federal spending, not revenue reduction. Also that "is needed" was grammatically ... tragic.

Plus, again, the no-plan thing. "It's really important for people to understand — the administration is urging Congress to vote fast on a proposal that doesn't exist," said Howard Gleckman of the Tax Policy Center. The center made a rather heroic effort to figure out what the consequences would be if you cobbled a proposal out of all the tax stuff Trump has mentioned, and concluded it would add about $8 trillion to the national debt over the next 10 years.

There's really a plus side to all this craziness. It's better to have a president who flips around like a jumping bean to one who has a disciplined, well-thought-out strategy for handing corporate America and hedge fund owners more tax breaks. You don't want all that much consistency when you've got a chief executive whose recent triumph in regulatory reform was to roll back the requirement that new highways be protected against flooding — 10 days before the first hurricane.

And of course there are people like Wyden who dreamed of doing something useful and bipartisan this term, and all the chaos makes them feel sad and hopeless.

Still, things could be worse. Pass the biscuits.

■

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

Since EOTEC is a success, board won't ask for money

Old George Anderson is at it again. He's just not happy despite the success of the county fair and Farm-City Pro Rodeo. A complaint about the begging? Why, that "begging for charity" was probably instrumental in making the event the success it was. George just can't stand a little constructive criticism. Shame on the *East Oregonian* for being so "silly" and Larry Marks for their one-sided articles. Though the construction schedule was tight after the initial squabbling, I think most everyone knew, when push came to shove, the fair and rodeo would be a success.

The questions now are about the next 51 weeks, and when George will be sending those letters to the city of Hermiston and Umatilla County commissioners boasting that additional city and county funding will no longer be required to support EOTEC. What with that state-of-the-art construction, it's nice to know they won't be needing that maintenance man after all. Perhaps it's George that's being a little "silly."

Kudos to city councilors Dale, the seed spitter, Primmer and Paul Chalmers for requesting the long overdue accounting of the huge sums spent by the Pendleton Development Commission. Until now, there has been no method to rate the success or failure of the Urban Renewal District program. Since the PDC is considering an extension of the program past the 2023, a rating program only seems prudent. Perhaps in the future, the "Pearl District" mentality of the past will be tempered with a little common sense.

While some think political speeches are the way to rally the people, our *EO* paper boy's display of spirit in the campaign to celebrate the Fourth of July in the manner intended is proof that deeds are more effective than words. The fireworks will return. Congratulations to a job well done, and my pick for Pendleton's "First Citizen" award.

Rick Rohde
Pendleton

Walden's blind obedience to Republican party politics

Walden's blind obedience to Trump and party is having devastating effects on the people and the environment in our state. But he is getting paid handsomely for it. According to Open Secrets, $1,003,881.

He has voted to repeal the Affordable Care Act. He has voted for health care that is available, only if one can afford it. He is generously supported by Insurance companies. Big Pharma, health professionals, HMO's, hospitals and nursing homes. He is for medical savings accounts. That is fine if you are wealthy, otherwise you die because you can't pay. Donations from these organizations: $650,856.

He pushes Trump's EPA program of slashing the EPA by one third of the budget, this means no bees, no food, toxic Pacific Garbage Patch, no marine life, dirty energy, no solar and no health protections for water and air to the tune of $610,989 in donations from electric and telephone utilities, gas and oil, law firms, lobbyists and accountants.

We need to support someone with goals that fulfill the needs of our people, get someone that will represent us not the rich or corporations that are only interested in their bottom line. Walden does not support low cost television advertising to candidates who agree to voluntary campaign spending limits. It is obvious why.

Shirley R. Hatlestad
Rogue River, Ore.

LETTERS POLICY

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