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OUR VIEW

Looking for leadership, not more excuses

Bad news keeps rolling out from the Oregon Health Authority. But instead of taking responsibility, Gov. Kate Brown not only ducked it but also tried to spin it as positive news.

The issue is that OHA paid too much to regional health-care organizations, collected too much money from the feds as a result, and might have to repay all of it.

Brown announced the issue in a roundabout way last week, issuing a press release headlined “New OHA Leadership Takes Action to Resolve Overpayments Made in Wake of Cover Oregon Failure.” It

praised new OHA director Patrick Allen “and his team for acting quickly to bring stability and transparency to OHA’s work on behalf of Oregonians. After just two months leading OHA, Allen has directed staff to resolve yet another consequence of the Cover Oregon technology failure. Governor Brown appreciates that Allen is making the resolution of these issues the top priority and looks forward to monthly updates on his team’s progress in resolving them.”

The overpayments were made to coordinated care organizations for patients who were eligible for both Medicaid and Medicare. This occurred from 2014 through mid-2016.

Brown is the state’s CEO. She is responsible what happens on her watch after becoming governor in February 2015.

Mistakes happen. Still, it is disappointing that OHA apparently overpaid \$74 million to 16 coordinated care organizations. It

is disconcerting that, according to the governor’s office, Brown only learned of the problem when Allen took over as OHA director. It is disturbing that Brown, through her press release, tried to spin the snafu instead of accepting her share of the responsibility.

Indeed, this does sound like

Cover Oregon, but not in the way Brown suggested. The Cover Oregon fiasco stemmed from Gov. John Kitzhaber appointing the wrong people to key jobs, not keeping close tabs on the project and accepting dubious progress reports. That also sounds like this new OHA

The OHA apparently overpaid \$74 million to 16 coordinated care organizations. Someone must be held responsible.

fiasco.

As governor, Brown is CEO of a multi-billion-dollar organization with tens of thousands of employees. A good CEO develops a solid record of hiring the right people, giving them freedom to do their jobs while also staying on top of their work. In that regard, Brown has a decidedly mixed record, although she did eventually oust Lynne Saxton as OHA director and bring in the well-regarded Allen.

It’s notable that Saxton was forced to resign in the wake of another failure of leadership at OHA, as the department sought to undermine the credibility of a Portland health care provider that was questioning the state’s rate-making process. Saxton denied any active role in the plan, but stepped down anyway.

No one, especially a politician, likes to look bad. But a good CEO builds confidence, trust and respect by taking responsibility when things go awry.

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

Aggressive plan needed to tackle harmful pollutants

Mankato (Minn.) Free Press

At a time when attention is being paid to the devastating effects pollution has worldwide — killing more people every year than all war and violence, a major study recently revealed — the U.S. may be dialing back its pollution controls.

Just the opposite should be happening.

The United States should take its role as a world leader seriously and be aggressive in tackling pollutants that make people sick. Asbestos and flame retardants are among the pollutants that do substantial harm; but instead of putting into place an earlier plan to look at chemicals in widespread use that result in the most common exposures, the new administration wants to limit the review to products still being manufactured and entering the marketplace, AP reports.

For asbestos, that means gauging the risks from just a few hundred tons of the material imported annually while excluding almost all of the estimated 8.9 million tons of asbestos-containing products that the U.S. Geological Survey said entered the marketplace between 1970 and 2016, according to AP.

That’s an alarming reduction, including to those who actually respond to alarms. Firefighters are put at risk just as much by the hazardous materials unleashed in a fire than the fire itself. A National Institute for Occupational

Safety and Health analysis of 30,000 firefighters deaths concluded firefighters contract mesothelioma — caused by inhaling asbestos fibers — at twice the rate of other U.S. residents.

Sickness and death attributed to responders working at 9/11 sites are evidence of pollutant risk on a massive scale. In June the World Trade Center Health Program, the federally funded organization that helps provide medical treatment for people affected by the attacks, counted more than 67,000 responders and 12,000 attack survivors as enrollees, the *Los Angeles Times* reported.

Construction workers who work around asbestos during demolition or remodeling as well as low-income residents who live in less-than-ideal conditions also are victims of such chemical exposure. Those in the midst of hurricane cleanup operations right now are exposed to numerous pollutants.

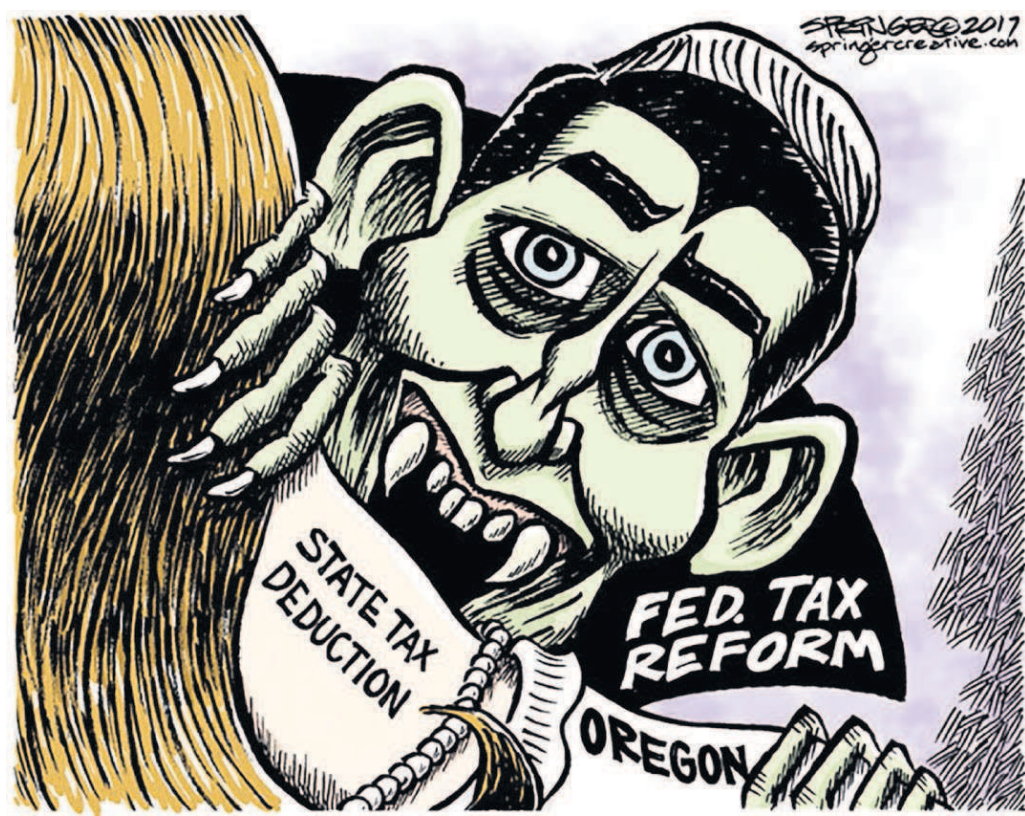
The administration’s reason for fighting tighter controls on the hazardous material is transparent. Fewer restrictions and less regulation are equated with being pro-business.

Dialing back efforts to make our environment safer, however, will take an economic toll in multiple ways from public health costs to loss of productivity to future cost of cleanup.

Beyond the financial cost is government accountability. Intentionally exposing the public to known carcinogens is ethically irresponsible.

LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters. Letters must be signed and include city of residence and a phone number. Email letters to editor@eastoregonian.com.



OTHER VIEWS

A conspiracy of inaction on sexual abuse

I caught the journalism bug in high school. I was fortunate to be a scholarship student at a rigorous New York private school with a weekly newspaper, and some of the older students I admired taught me the power that the written word could have.

When we complained verbally to teachers or administrators about a problem, they could ignore us. When we put our arguments in writing, they tended to pay attention. So we became teenage crusaders, inveighing against perceived injustices. Sometimes, the subjects were sophomoric (“censorship” of the talent show), but often they were serious (inequality, racism, South African divestment).

Three decades later, I look back on the experience with deep gratitude. I also look back with haunting regret.

For all of our crusading, we ignored the biggest story at the school. We were aware of the rumors — the teachers who made comments about girls’ bodies, the teacher suspiciously friendly with female students, the music teacher solicitous of male students.

But we never wrote about it. As best as I can remember, we didn’t even talk about writing about it. We didn’t know how. It seemed too dark, too uncertain.

In 2012, the truth came out. My school — Horace Mann — had tolerated sexual molestation for decades. Administrators whose most solemn responsibility was protecting children instead chose to look the other way and protect child abusers. The music teacher, a cultish figure named Johannes Somary, was the worst abuser during my time. One of his victims later committed suicide.

The current torrent of harassment revelations — following Jodi Kantor’s and Megan Twohey’s *New York Times* exposé of Harvey Weinstein — has caused me to think back on high school again, because every big case has had something in common with Horace Mann.

People knew.

Even if they didn’t know the details — I didn’t know what Somary was actually doing — they knew that something was wrong. At Fox News, many knew that Roger Ailes and Bill O’Reilly mistreated women. At ABC, The New Republic and NPR, respectively, people talked about the harassment by Mark Halperin, Leon Wieseltier and Michael Oreskes. In Hollywood, people talked about Weinstein and Kevin Spacey — not to mention Donald Trump, who nonetheless became a heavily promoted reality star.

As the screenwriter Scott Rosenberg has written about Weinstein, “Everybody knew.” (The full quotation includes a colloquial adverb of emphasis between “everybody” and “knew.”)

“Maybe we didn’t know the degree.



DAVID LEONHARDT
Comment

The magnitude of the awfulness,” Rosenberg continued. “But we knew something.”

And yet no one did anything about it. People were afraid to, or didn’t know how. So they — we — became part of an unwitting conspiracy of inaction.

This conspiracy has spanned the relatively powerless, like interns, secretaries and teenagers, to the wealthy and famous, as well as every level of power in between. Jill

Abramson, my old boss, is one of the toughest journalists I know. Still, as a midlevel manager two decades ago, she didn’t go over the head of her old boss — Oreskes — to report his behavior at *The Times*, as she regretfully said last week.

Post-Weinstein, the emphasis has been on holding other abusers

accountable. So far, each seems to deserve his delayed consequences. (And, yes, the severity of the various abuses varies.) I hope the exposés continue.

But post facto truth and punishment are not enough. We also need to figure out how to prevent future abuse. We need to make inaction feel unacceptable.

Doing so will require changes from both organizations and individuals. Every workplace and school should be asking itself: Do people here know how to report a suspicion of abuse? Do they feel comfortable doing so even when, as is typical, they have only an incomplete sense of it?

At most places, the answers remain no and no.

Organizations need “multiple, accessible avenues of complaint,” as a federal task force concluded. These avenues should be blazingly obvious, not buried in a corporate policy that nobody reads. They should include anonymous reporting options. They should feed into a process that’s confidential and fair, including to the accused.

Every leader should also read case studies, to understand how frequently other leaders, at Horace Mann, NPR and elsewhere, have bungled these situations, usually through cowardice. Often, a victim or someone else did summon the courage to come forward, only to have the institution do little or nothing.

But the changes can’t be only about policies and organizations. They need to be personal, too. I’m guessing that you get angry when you think about the abuse committed by Weinstein, O’Reilly, Trump or Somary — about the long-lasting misery they have inflicted on other human beings. I certainly do.

The next time I see something that doesn’t seem quite right, I’m going to remember that anger. One conspiracy of inaction is more than enough for a lifetime.

David Leonhardt is an op-ed columnist for *The New York Times*.

YOUR VIEWS

Commissioner Givens should focus on his own county

This is an open letter to the citizens of Umatilla County regarding Commissioner Larry Givens’ editorial in our local paper opposing a home rule charter in Douglas County. One would think Givens has his hands full just managing the affairs of Umatilla County. Yet you are paying him \$90,853 a year, not including benefits or PERS — which is likely 35 percent more — to meddle in Douglas County’s affairs. Really? We must wonder why a Umatilla County commissioner is concerned with a home rule charter initiative happening in our community.

Are they afraid it’s catching? Let’s hope so. It is both offensive and taboo for a commissioner from another county to involve himself in the politics and affairs of another local government. Commissioner Givens opposed our charter on behalf of our commissioners, who are under suspicion for misuse of federal Title III dollars as recently reported in *The Oregonian*.

These same commissioners have closed the county’s libraries and failed to support or promote a local measure to keep them open, outsourced public health services, have seen fit to log old growth trees at our county parks

and approved planning permits allowing a foreign corporation to take private properties through eminent domain.

Are similar decisions in Umatilla County’s future?

Our charter called for five commissioners elected from throughout the rural areas of our county, giving those outlying communities a voice at the table, and a professional salaried county manager; not just someone whose only qualification is “they can win elections.” Umatilla County citizens are very generous considering your county’s median income is \$45,000 and you pay your commissioners more than \$90,000 a year — and that doesn’t even include the cost of their benefit package. Douglas County commissioners’ salaries are \$77,459 annually, or \$121,000-plus with benefits and PERS. A bit out of whack when you consider the average annual income in Douglas County is right around \$38,000. Starting to see our point?

Home rule is the privilege of citizens at the grass roots level to manage their own affairs and institute measures requiring accountability from elected officials. Home rule assumes government concerns should be solved at the level closest to the people and is the cornerstone of a democratic local government.

Diana Larson and Stacey McLaughlin
Myrtle Creek