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OUR VIEW

Trump's denigration of FBI is self-serving

The FBI is so universally familiar to Americans that it's unnecessary to spell out its name. Its initials are synonymous with a kind of stolid professionalism. Like our northern neighbor where the Royal Canadian Mounted Police famously "always gets their man," the FBI isn't glamorous, but is who you want on your side if there's a criminal to apprehend.

It isn't without fault. In the post-9/11 era, its anti-terror focus has sometimes been overzealous, generating complaints from minority communities and civil libertarians. But long gone are the days of J. Edgar Hoover, its legendary founding director, who infamously played fast and loose in pursuing personal vendettas and agendas. At least since it became known that FBI Associate Director Mark Felt served as the *Washington Post's* secret source in upending the corrupt Nixon administration, a large majority of Americans sees the FBI as an honest and neutral bulwark against wrongdoers of all kinds, in or out of government.

This makes it all the more astounding to hear a U.S. president denigrate the FBI. Claiming the agency's stature is in "tatters," President Trump is lashing out at an American institution with a far better reputation than he enjoys himself.

Trump's reaction to the FBI's legally sanctioned investigation of Russian involvement in the last election may be understandable from someone who regards

himself as a tough street fighter. But running down the FBI at the time when it has hundreds of investigations going, some of them dangerous, is not smart for the nation's chief executive officer, who oversees the FBI and ought to have its agents' welfare and safety in mind.

The Republican Party of days gone by was a proud defender of law and order. It is sad to see the GOP's leader and his enablers turn against our most potent police agency, which has been effective at combating organized crime and blocking attacks by foreign terrorists.

It is a standard ploy to attack government during political campaigns, but quite another to sabotage it after being elected. Meanwhile, the rest of us need government to function. And we sure as hell need the FBI to continue doing its job well.

Thankfully, there is no evidence for what Trump is suggesting. Robert Mueller, the retired

FBI director now directing the independent investigation of election interference, promptly relieved one agent of his duty because of a pro-Clinton email. This is a sign that the agency has a self-correcting mechanism. It still treasures objectivity, fairness and truthfulness. Trump, of course, has no use for any of these values.

Trump is simply trying to derail an investigation that is now penetrating his operation. We must make certain the FBI stays on the job.



AP Photo/Andrew Harnik

Former FBI Director Robert Mueller, the special counsel probing Russian interference in the 2016 election.

It is sad to see the GOP's leader and his enablers turn against our most potent police agency, which has been effective at combating organized crime and blocking attacks by foreign terrorists.

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.

STAR TRIBUNE
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OTHER VIEWS

Susan Collins and the duping of centrists

Susan Collins is often called one of the last centrists. She is a classic New England Republican, a senator who mostly votes with her party but is willing to buck it.

A couple of weeks ago, Collins made a classic Collins deal. It tried to split the difference between Democratic and Republican positions.

But it sure looks like a bum deal now. It also looks like a cautionary tale for anyone who wants to occupy the political center during the age of Donald Trump and a radicalized Republican Party.

Here's the back story: Collins said that she would vote for the recent Senate tax bill so long as Republicans leaders promised to pass other legislation — in the near future — that would reduce the bill's knock-on damage to health care programs.

She laid out three conditions. She wanted her colleagues to pass two separate bills that would shore up insurance markets for people who weren't covered through their job. And she wanted congressional leaders to promise to undo the Medicare and Medicaid cuts automatically triggered by the deficit increase from the tax cut.

Her colleagues assured her they would pass the bills she wanted — not immediately but soon after the tax bill had passed. Collins decided that was good enough, and on Dec. 2, she became one of 51 yes votes on the tax bill.

When Collins describes her deal, she makes it sound both ironclad — her word — and substantial. She has spoken of a personal commitment from Mitch McConnell, the Senate majority leader. And she's emphasized that the deal isn't merely for show. It will, she insists, protect Medicaid and Medicare — two programs particularly important to Mainers, given the state's large elderly population.

"I also got an ironclad commitment that we're not going to see cuts in the Medicaid/Medicare program as a result of this bill," Collins said on "Meet the Press."

But some of Collins' fellow Republicans evidently have a different definition of ironclad.

Within days of the Senate vote on the tax bill, conservative House Republicans started saying that they didn't care about her deal. She did not make it with them, and they do not feel bound by it as they negotiate the bill's final language with the Senate. These House members, as Politico put it Friday, have decided to "thumb their nose" at Collins.

Meanwhile, Paul Ryan, the speaker of the House, has been undermining Collins in his own way. He has made clear that he will use the

new deficits created by the tax bill to justify the very thing Collins opposes: Medicare and Medicaid cuts. Those programs, Ryan told a talk-radio host, are "really where the problem lies, fiscally speaking." Cutting them is a top priority for 2018.

If anything, Ryan's snub is more significant. House conservatives might still fold and approve the narrow deal that Collins thought she had. But Republicans will not permit the more meaningful promise she's made — that

the tax bill won't lead to health care cuts. Tax cuts and health care cuts are inexorably bound.

So in exchange for her vote, Collins received, at best, a cosmetic fix that she will have to pretend is something more.

What was her mistake? It was both tactical and strategic.

The tactical error was to fritter her moment of leverage, when the Senate bill's fate was uncertain and she had the potential to influence other swing senators. Instead of demanding something real, she accepted vague promises.

She can still vote against the version of the bill that emerges from House-Senate negotiations, but she doesn't have the sway she did before. Senators usually don't switch their vote at this stage, and the tax bill will pass without her if no other Republican flips (with Vice President Mike Pence breaking a 50-50 tie.)

Her strategic error is the one that holds lessons for other would-be centrists. Namely, she defined the political center in relative terms rather than substantive terms. Republican leaders — not just Trump, but McConnell and Ryan too — have moved sharply to the right. They are rushing through a bill without the normal procedures. They are making verifiably false claims about it. And they have decided that taking health insurance away from Americans is a core Republican principle.

Collins made the mistake of chasing after an impossible deal. She wanted to position herself between the two political parties, and she wanted to protect Medicare and Medicaid. When it proved impossible to do both, she claimed otherwise — and put a higher priority on politics than policy.

In Trump's Washington, other centrist Republicans are going to face a version of her dilemma, again and again. They are going to have decide which matters more to them: being a loyal Republican or being an actual centrist.

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



DAVID LEONHARDT
Comment

YOUR VIEWS

GOP tax bill no help to the middle class

Why do our elected representative keep telling us the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act helps the middle class? While the bill initially reduces taxes for low and middle income taxpayers, many of the allowances that contribute to those reductions phase out quickly, so that by 2023, those groups would be paying more than under current law. Congress is already talking about the need to reduce social welfare programs so the increase in the deficit created by the new tax bill would be smaller. Those reductions will also hurt low and middle income taxpayers.

Why do they tell us the bill will create more jobs? The bills reduce the cost of buying new machinery (think robots) while increasing the cost of getting an education to train for good paying jobs (think taxing tuition waivers). Even if the tax reductions were to lead corporations and large businesses to create more jobs, it wouldn't matter here in Eastern Oregon where there already is not enough affordable housing for all those who could work here. Bonds issued by cities or states on behalf of private and nonprofit developers (private activity bonds) serve as a tax-exempt means of financing all

sorts of projects including affordable housing. The house version of the bill would eliminate the tax exemption for such bonds. Low Income Housing Tax Credits would be less attractive in an environment of lower corporate taxes. Building and maintaining affordable housing would be harder under the new tax bill so our housing stock would fall further behind the demand, raising housing prices for everyone.

Why is it more important to end the estate tax on the few ultra-large estates that still pay such a tax than to renew the Child Health Insurance Program? Ending the estate tax is not going to create jobs. Providing health insurance to children immediately puts money in family pockets and helps children be healthy in the process.

Why is the tax bill being rushed through Congress? Is it perhaps so we won't have time to tell our representative that we object to a bill that harms middle and low income people, benefits the wealthy, and increases the deficit? Call your congressman now to ask them to vote against the proposed tax bill! Tell them to start over and think carefully about protecting the people who elected them.

Lindsay Winsor
Milton-Freewater

Evaluate politicians by policy, not personality

Stop it. Name calling Trump isn't going to bring him down. Accusing him of being a racist isn't going to bring him down. This Robert Mueller "investigation into collusion with Russia" isn't going to bring him down. The "leaked" Access Hollywood tape didn't bring him down. Trump won because our politicians failed us.

Republicans have lacked the spine for generations to unify with a cohesive agenda out of fear of their public image. Democrats don't care about anyone. They only see fit to tell you what is wrong in the world and who to blame for it.

Do not continue more of this childish tabloid BS. If you don't like Trump, disagree with his policies, but attacking his character doesn't work and weakens your position. He obviously thrives on that and you only help him by driving his supporters further away from you and closer to him.

No matter what side of the political spectrum you are on, hold all your politicians accountable for the jobs they do or more "Trump's" will crop up in the future.

Jordan Whetsler
Umatilla

Menace in the Blue Mountains

Farmers, hunters and hikers beware! There is a murdering herd of chipmunks killing off cows, sheep, llamas, deer, elk, turkeys and grouse.

If this sounds ridiculous to you, consider the fact that ODFW can investigate a llama kill that is partly eaten, with wolf tracks 20 yards away and trail camera photos of a wolf pack 300 yards away but can't determine it as a wolf kill.

ODFW loves these wolves. They are job security. ODFW gets to spend their days in the woods checking on and learning what the wolves are doing. They get to ride around in trucks, airplanes and helicopters all paid for by taxpayers. They spend time in the forest on our nickel, tagging and monitoring wolves and investigating kills on livestock. But the burden of proof is so stringent that many kills are obvious but never declared a wolf kill.

If it does become obvious that a wolf or a pack is killing livestock that it can't be ignored by ODFW, a ton more money is spent hunting and killing the predators to blame.

There is no way of knowing how many deer, elk, turkey and grouse are killed to support these killer chipmunks throughout Oregon.

Roger Robinson
Hermiston

LETTERS POLICY

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