

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

DEQ should catch up before adding new work

Rural Oregon is no stranger to watching laws and rules get made in Salem that have negative and unintended effects in our part of the state.

It's also not uncommon to watch the state make a grandiose plan with the intent of improving the lives of its citizens without the means to carry it out or a clear grasp of the problems it will face.

We're seeing a little of both from the Department of Environmental Quality, the agency tasked with monitoring our air, water and land, implementing rules to keep them clean, and punishing those who don't follow the law.

As we learned today in a state audit, the DEQ is struggling to keep up with that mission. A backlog of permits and inspections are plaguing the agency, possibly putting the health of Oregonians at risk as rules already on the books aren't being enforced.

The audit pointed to a few reasons. There's the "poorly documented and inconsistent" permitting process, which makes for extra work tracking individual

cases and headaches for businesses that have to deal with the agency. There's also more than 100 vacant positions at the DEQ, spreading that work out among too few employees.

On top of that, the Cleaner Air Oregon initiative set in motion by Governor Kate Brown has added to the workload of the agency already thin on employees.

The Cleaner Air project is in response to toxic emissions detected at a glass factory in southeast Portland in 2016.

It would require companies to report their use of about 600 chemicals, including heavy metals and other air pollutants, and then calculate potential health risks to nearby communities. The plan could be approved by the Environmental Quality Commission as early as July.

It's the kind of rule that looks great on paper — a quick response to a problem that may have damaged the health of the factory's neighbors, both human and natural. But it's also a broad brush.

We understand that environmental regulations require big picture thinking.



AP Photo/Jim Cole, File

In this 2015 file photo, a plume of steam billows from the coal-fired Merrimack Station in Bow, New Hampshire.

What good is a local regulation if the community upstream isn't following healthy guidelines?

But in the case of Cleaner Air Oregon, we'd suggest the DEQ get its house in order before enacting new rules, so it can fully understand the impact on all sectors.

We're thinking specifically of the food processing industry, which makes up about 28 percent of employment in Morrow County and 6 percent in Umatilla County.

We expect these producers to be held accountable for their emissions, but adding another broad layer of bureaucracy isn't the way to do it. It won't make the air cleaner, nor find previously undetected harmful elements.

It makes food processing expansion in Umatilla and Morrow counties less enticing, while adding no benefits in quality of life for our residents.

We hope the DEQ and EQC take these concerns into consideration before passing a feel-good blanket rule.

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YOUR VIEWS

Don't pass tax that increases health care costs

There is a special state election January 23. The election is to pass a hospital sales tax. It is not bad enough that Oregon has raised the gas tax, registration fee and payroll tax for mass transit in western Oregon.

Ballot Measure 101 is a sick tax. If you are in the hospital they will add on to your bill. Just another way to add a sales tax.

I for one can not afford any more taxes. I am voting no on all new taxes. Vote no on the hospital sales tax.

Rex J. Morehouse
Pendleton

Umatilla County must allow more rural development

Regarding your editorial of Dec. 27, "Oregon must protect its ag zoning rules," I would like to provide a rebuttal.

The current zoning program is not what was originally promised. It is totally socialistic. It is designed to force everyone into paying city water, sewer, garbage, taxes and retirement benefits. It's about government control.

We were originally promised 10-acre home sites, then 19, then 40, and now 160 to 240 acre minimum lot sizes. We were also promised 10-year periodic reviews to insure that there would be a 10-year supply. Very few people want or can afford 160-acre parcels. No periodic reviews are being done now.

Remember that about 10 years ago Oregonians passed Ballot Measure 37 to allow for more building sites outside of our urban growth boundaries.

The Legislature quickly passed Measure 49 to allow two 2-acre clustered building sites adjacent to certain qualifying land

owners' improvements. No one likes living in the country right next to two other neighbors.

Douglas County is growing faster than Umatilla County and the conflict between socialism and free enterprise was bound to happen. If Oregon's economy was better it would have already happened.

Umatilla County's planning department has killed numerous job opportunities. Costco at Stalene in Milton-Freewater, an autoplex at Ferndale Road in Milton-Freewater, commercial growth on the Highway 11 between Milton-Freewater and Stalene, a compost operation between Adams and Athena, Oregon's largest truck stop at Westland Road and housing at the Pendleton Country Club.

We now have virtually no building sites available outside of the urban growth boundaries in east Umatilla County. We need an inventory of 2-acre, 5-acre and 10-acre building sites.

Government thinks that landowners want to develop those sites. If they do not sell their property, taxes completely eat up the profits in 2 to 4 years. Landowners are not going to race into financial ruin. Planners would simply target the locations that they wanted these to happen. Planners would understand affordable housing and encourage "smart growth." Smart growth has narrower roads, smaller cul-de-sacs, curbs and sidewalks on one side of the street and barrow pits on the downhill side of the streets, to eliminate stormwater runoffs into our streams.

There has been a zero planning vision in Umatilla County for the last 30 years. We are now hiring a new planning director. Let us hope we get one that understands demand and supply, affordable housing principals and jobs.

Kalvin B. Garton
Pendleton

Quick takes: Measure 101 and health care

I'm a single mom of a special needs child, but I work and pay a hefty price to have medical. Maybe if so many people didn't abuse the system, who actually have health insurance at work, instead of mooching off the system, this wouldn't be a problem.

— Hannah Pullen

OTHER VIEWS

Far from disappearing, dossier investigation intensifies

House Intelligence Committee chairman Devin Nunes has issued a subpoena to David Kramer, a former State Department official who, in late November 2016, traveled to London to receive a briefing and a copy of the Trump dossier from its author, former British spy Christopher Steele. Kramer then returned to the U.S. to give the document to Sen. John McCain.

Kramer is a senior fellow at the McCain Institute for International Leadership at Arizona State University.

McCain later took a copy of the dossier to the FBI's then-director, James Comey. But the FBI already had the document; Steele himself gave the dossier to the bureau in installments, reportedly beginning in early July 2016.

McCain, recovering in Arizona from treatments for cancer, has long refused to detail his actions regarding the dossier. For his part, Kramer was interviewed by the House Intelligence Committee on Dec. 19. The new subpoena stems from statements Kramer made in that interview.

In the session, Kramer told House investigators that he knew the identities of the Russian sources for the allegations in Steele's dossier. But when investigators pressed Kramer to reveal those names, he declined to do so.

Now, he is under subpoena. The subpoena, issued on Dec. 27, directs Kramer to appear again before House investigators on Jan. 11.

Knowing Steele's sources is a critical part of the congressional dossier investigation, for both sides. If one argues the document is not verified and never will be, it is critical to learn the identity of the sources to support that conclusion. If one argues the document is the whole truth, or largely true, knowing sources is equally critical.

Beyond that, there is another reason to know Steele's sources, and that is to learn not just the origin of the dossier but its place in the larger Trump-Russia affair. There is a growing belief among some congressional investigators that the Russians who provided information to Steele were using Steele to disrupt the American election as much as the Russians who distributed hacked Democratic Party emails. In some investigators' views, they are the two sides of the Trump-Russia project, both aimed at sowing chaos and discord in the American political system.

Meanwhile, in a Fox News interview on Dec. 29, Sen. Lindsey Graham strongly suggested there is something untoward in the dossier material. Noting that special counsel Robert Mueller is not investigating the dossier, Graham said he — Graham — has finally gotten a look at the origins and use of the document.

"I've spent some time in the last couple of days, after a lot of fighting with the Department of Justice, to get the background on the dossier, and here's what I can tell

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your viewers: I'm very disturbed about what the Department of Justice did with this dossier, and we need a special counsel to look into that, because that's not in Mueller's charter. And what I saw, and what I've gathered in the last couple of days, bothers me a lot, and I'd like somebody outside DOJ to look into how this dossier was handled and what they did with it."

Host Brian Kilmeade asked Graham whether he was disturbed by the contents of the dossier or how the Justice Department used it in the Trump-Russia investigation. Graham continued:

"And the one thing I can say, every prosecutor has a duty to the court to disclose things that are relevant to the request. So any time a document is used to go to court, for legal reasons, I think the Department of Justice owes it to the court to be up-and-up about exactly what this document is about, who paid for it, who's involved, what their motives might be. And I can just say this: After having looked at the history of the dossier, and how it was used by the Department of Justice, I'm really very concerned, and this cannot be the new normal."

What, precisely, did Graham mean? A well-informed source would not explain beyond Graham's words, and a Justice Department source did not respond to a request for comment.

But by discussing when "a document is used to go to court," Graham seemed to refer to the dossier and the U.S. Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court. And he seemed to suggest that, if the FBI used revelations from the dossier to secure a warrant to spy on Americans, it was not fully transparent about the source of those revelations, which was an opposition-research project funded by the Hillary Clinton campaign. FBI and Justice Department officials have told Congress they have not been able to verify the dossier's substantive allegations of collusion between Russia and the Trump campaign.

Further, Graham found the dossier affair serious enough to warrant an entirely new investigation, as he does not appear to trust the Justice Department to investigate itself on this particular issue.

But there has been serious resistance to the idea of another special counsel in the Trump-Russia matter. Such investigations are inevitably subject to mission creep and can go on seemingly forever. It's unclear whether anything would be done in response to Graham's call.

In any event, the efforts pushed by Nunes and the Senate show that Congress, if it is aggressive, can investigate a matter like this. They also indicate that, rather than going away, the dossier investigation will only intensify in the new year.

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

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