

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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## OUR VIEW

## A model statesman

Politics isn't easy.

Combining personal principles with the will of your constituents and coming up with a workable policy is one thing.

Selling that policy to a body of differing principles and wills and agendas is another.

Coming home at the end of a day with your conscience intact and something to show for your efforts is something else entirely.

For 18 years, Bob Jenson represented our corner of Eastern Oregon in the halls of the Capitol in Salem, and for 18 years he navigated the delicate balance of standing firm on his own principles, pursuing the most good for District 58 and negotiating with the other forces at work in the Legislature.

At the end of each day, each session, each term, Jenson could stand proud by his work.

He was known as the Dean of the House, and when he stepped down in 2014 he was the longest serving member of the body. He was respected on both sides of the aisle, in part

because the aisle didn't mean much to him.

When Jenson first won the seat in 1997, he ran as a Democrat and retired Blue Mountain Community College professor. Soon disillusioned by the party, he became an Independent in 1998 and then a Republican in 1999.

The label didn't define him, though, and the educator who made Pendleton his home instead focused on ways to make peoples' lives better.

His philosophy on the environment, shaped by his upbringing on a Montana ranch, drove him to sponsor a wolf compensation bill as the predators moved into northeastern Oregon. His background as a teacher pushed him to approve a corporate tax increase to help fund Oregon schools and promote mental health coverage in rural Oregon.

He developed the habit of bringing west-end legislators out east to see his district and better understand his point of view.

He was ambitious, but not in a political sense. He wasn't interested



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Rep. Bob Jenson signs paperwork on the first day of the legislative session Monday, Feb. 4, 2013 at the state capitol in Salem.

in higher office, and keeping his seat longer and longer into his retirement was his way of putting his experience to good use.

Jenson's death this week has brought both condolences and praise from all over, from Gov. Kate Brown and Rep.

Greg Walden to State Sen. Bill Hansell and State Rep. Greg Barreto.

It should serve as a reminder to everyone in politics that a life well-lived is one grounded in character and compromise. Jenson understood both, and we're proud that he represented us.



## YOUR VIEWS

### Vote on Walden's record, not his promises

Our elected representative, Greg Walden, toured Eastern Oregon talking to his constituents and intimating that the new tax bill was the best thing since sliced bread. Several independent studies have shown that is not true. The burden imposed by the new law falls almost exclusively on the working poor, the middle class and rural citizens.

These studies show that hundreds of rural hospitals will be forced to close their doors. Hundreds of rural schools will be forced to consolidate, with communities losing their identities and the closeness and solidarity that a local school provides. Tax breaks for homeowners will disappear and health care costs that are not lost entirely will go up for everyone (estimated 10 percent the first year). The cost of going to college will increase as will the burden of student loans.

Representative Walden slavishly followed the line given out by the Republican Party and disregarded the consequences to be suffered by his constituents. At every stop on his tour he assured listeners that the middle class was going to see huge tax reductions, and jobs and prosperity were on the way. This based on the failed trickle down theory practiced in bankrupt Kansas. Small tax breaks are going to occur for some middle class citizens, but only for two to three years. These small reductions are offset by the additional burdens imposed by health costs and other taxes. The tax breaks for corporations are permanent.

The wealthy and corporations (whose total wealth increased in 2017 by one trillion dollars) will receive 99 percent of the tax windfall. Walden was elected to look after the interests of his own constituents. In this he has failed miserably and does not deserve to hold his office.

Do not take my word, I admit a bias towards lies and misdirection. Look at the facts. All of the information available on both conservative outlets and more traditional sites. Don't live in a bubble.

I urge well informed voters to base future votes on Walden's record — on what he has done, not on what he has said.

Terry Andersen  
Pendleton

### Contact your representative Greg Walden

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### Vote to repeal health care tax

Measure 101 is much worse than a sales tax to fund Medicaid. It is much worse than an inequitable, unsustainable and patently unfair tax on the backs of some Oregonians but not all, including those struggling to pay for their own health care premiums.

Measure 101 taxes are not constitutionally protected to fund only health care in Oregon. That means those that vote in favor of Measure 101 are trusting the same politicians that gave us Cover Oregon that according to the U. S. House Oversight Committee "squandered \$305 million federal taxpayer dollars."

That means we must trust Gov. Kate Brown instead of ourselves with our health care dollars. According to the May 17 Oregonian, Gov. Brown dispensed millions of dollars in Medicaid to 55,000 Oregonians "who were later deemed ineligible," at a cost of over \$280 million. The funds were never recovered.

The government always wants more money to cover its excessive appetite and — in the case of Obamacare, Cover Oregon, and Medicaid — its incompetence; its fraudulent waste of taxpayer funds.

That is why the Democrats have labeled Measure 101 an assessment, because they lack the integrity to tell their constituency they will tax more of your hard-earned money in an effort to cover up their waste and infidelity.

Stuart Dick  
Irrigon

## OTHER VIEWS

## Trump's petticoat government

Incapacity in the chief executive is not a new thing in American history. James Garfield spent half his short presidency dying slowly from a gunshot wound. Richard Nixon's condition in his final days was dire enough that his secretary of defense effectively cut him out of the nuclear chain of command. Woodrow Wilson's stroke and his wife's influence thereafter produced the immortal — if, of course, highly problematic — complaint from one of Wilson's senatorial critics that "we have a petticoat government! ... Mrs. Wilson is president!"

What's different about Donald Trump is that his inability to handle the weight and responsibility of his office is not something that crept up gradually, not something imposed by an assassin's bullet or a stroke or a late-in-the-presidency crisis. Instead it's been a defining feature of his administration from Day 1 — and indeed was obvious during the campaign that elected him.

This means that the president's unfitness is not really a Harvey Weinstein-style "open secret," an awful reality known to insiders but kept from hoi polloi, as *The Atlantic's* James Fallows suggested this week amid the mania over Michael Wolff's gonzo inside-the-White-House book. Indeed, it's not any kind of secret: Even if it's considered politically unwise for prominent Republicans to mention it, anyone who reads the papers (the *New York Times* especially) knows that some combination of Trump's personality and temperament and advancing age leave him constantly undone by the obligations of the presidency.

In a column early in his tempestuous first year, I suggested that this obvious fact potentially justified the invocation of the 25th Amendment, which permits a president's Cabinet in consultation with the legislative branch to remove him from the White House.

The material in Wolff's book provides more grist for that argument; the book may be dubious in some particulars but as the consummate insiders Jim VandeHei and Mike Allen wrote Thursday, the parts about Trump's capabilities and mental state "ring unambiguously true." (And again, one does not need to be a well-sourced insider to recognize this fact; one need only have access to the president's own Twitter feed.)

But Op-Ed provocations notwithstanding, the 25th Amendment option isn't happening — not without some major presidential deterioration in the midst of a major crisis, and probably not even then. And while I blame Republicans for a thousand things that brought us to this pass, it's too extreme to blame them for not pursuing an option that's never been tried before, against a president who was recently and (yes) legitimately elected, especially when that option requires extraordinary coordination across the

legislative and executive branches and could easily fail ... with God-only-knows what kind of consequences.

So unless Robert Mueller has more goods than I expect, we are going to live for the next few years in the way that America lived during the waning days of Nixon, the end of the Wilson administration, and perhaps at other moments known only to presidential inner circles — with our own equivalent of the petticoat government, which in this case includes military uniforms, dress suits and whatever outfits Ivanka and Kellyanne Conway favor (but not, any longer, the layering of collared shirts perfected by Steve Bannon).

Which means the central question of these years is not a normal policy question, or even the abnormal sort that the Resistance and other fascism-fearers expect to face. The idea of a right-populist agenda died with Bannon's exit from the White House, the standard-issue GOP agenda has little left after the tax cuts, and Trump's authoritarian impulses, while genuine, seem unlikely to produce even aggrandizement on the scale of past presidents from FDR to Nixon, because he has no competence to execute on them.

Rather, the big question is organizational, managerial, and psychological: Can the people who surround Donald Trump work around his incapacity successfully enough to keep his unfitness from producing a historic calamity?

They have done so for a year, with some debacles (Puerto Rico) but also some genuine successes (the defeat of the Islamic State). People may laugh at Wolff's assertion that "the men and women of the West Wing, for all that the media was ridiculing them, actually felt they had a responsibility to the country," and for some figures (perhaps especially in the press office) the laughter will be justified. But for others the work has been necessary and important, and the achievement of relative stability a genuine service to the United States.

Can it continue in the face of some greater crisis than Trump has yet confronted? Can it continue if the Democrats take a share of power or if the president's own family faces legal jeopardy? Is the American system more able to correct for presidential incapacity than some of us have feared?

The past year has given us some reason to think the answer to the last question might be "yes." May the new year give us more, because our president's chaotic mind isn't going anywhere.

Ross Douthat joined *The New York Times* as an Op-Ed columnist in April 2009. Previously, he was a senior editor at *The Atlantic*.



ROSS DOUTHAT  
Comment

Can the people who surround Donald Trump work around his incapacity successfully enough to keep his unfitness from producing a historic calamity?