

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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Tip of the hat, kick in the pants



■ **A tip of the hat Emergency responders and volunteers answered the call last weekend to help Milton-Freewater area flood victims Ginger and Brian Afdahl.**

The North Fork Walla Walla River flooded the 10 acres of their homestead on Feb. 4. Ginger Afdahl said most of the water receded but left a big mess, with mud and gravel covering much of their land.

That's when the Northwest Region of Team Rubicon got involved

Team Rubicon is an international nonprofit that unites military veterans with first responders to take on disasters. The organization has sent teams to hurricanes Maria and Harvey and the wildfires in Sonoma County, California. Coming to Umatilla County was a first, as was teaming up with Umatilla County emergency management.

Ginger Afdahl said the flood buried irrigation lines, fencing and more under rocks and gravel, and the volunteers

removed much of that from the muck. They also removed hay from the shed so it could dry and put up fences.

"I couldn't thank them enough," she said. "If it wasn't for their help, I don't know what we would have done. It would have taken us forever. There was a lot of rock, a lot of tangled mess. They helped us a lot."

■ **A tip of the hat to a new bill speeding its way through the Oregon legislature that will benefit local farmers.**

Early organization has proved advantageous for supporters of a bill establishing minimum contract protections for all Oregon seed growers, which the House unanimously approved Tuesday.

Under House Bill 4068, dealers must pay farmers market prices for seed by certain deadlines enforced by the Oregon Department of Agriculture. Grass seed crops have received



Photo contributed by Umatilla County Emergency Management
Volunteers and members of the nonprofit disaster relief organization Team Rubicon work Saturday to clear fencing from flood debris on a home near Milton-Freewater.

similar protections since 2011 under a statute aimed at preventing "slow pay, no pay" problems, but other types of seed were excluded from the legislation.

Before the idea of expanding the contract protections was brought to the Oregon lawmakers, the specifics were hashed out by farmers, seed dealers and trade groups.

By the time HB 4068 was introduced, all the details had been hammered out and the bill sailed through the House Agriculture Committee without any opposing testimony or even an amendment.

It's the kind of pre-planning that should be required of bills brought up during the short session.

OTHER VIEWS

The Trump stain spreads

Winston Churchill is supposed to have said: "With integrity, nothing else counts. Without integrity, nothing else counts."

In fact, that seems to be one of those Churchillian epigrams that Churchill never actually got around to saying. But it captures an important truth about politics, that dishonor is like a cancer that spreads inexorably as it feeds upon ambition, protects itself with lies and doubles down with cover-ups.

Looking at the chaos in the White House these days, I worry about inexperience, incompetence and lack of judgment. But maybe I worry most about an utter lack of integrity — and the way it is proving infectious.

The contagion of dishonor has spread irresistibly through the White House staff, turning aides into con artists. Indifference to ethics has spread through the Cabinet and agencies, resulting in endless scandals. And the epidemic has rippled through much of the GOP (with some heroic exceptions), turning lawmakers into enablers and hypocrites.

The Rob Porter affair, for example, isn't just about Porter any more but about what seems to be a cover-up and a dismissiveness toward domestic violence. John Kelly, the White House chief of staff, claimed that he had removed Porter within 40 minutes of learning of credible allegations of Porter's domestic abuse; to listen to FBI testimony, it now seems it may have been seven months.

President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that he is against domestic violence. But when you have to say that, something is wrong.

We have a president who has himself been accused of domestic violence (an allegation of rape by his first wife that she later retracted), who has lost two aides to accusations of domestic violence, whose chief of staff (a retired four-star Marine general) in 2016 praised a colonel as a "superb Marine officer" after he had been accused of sexually harassing two women. More broadly, while I understand the sorrow people feel for a colleague who is self-immolating, the White House's initial comments came across as discounting one of the most common kinds of violence in America today.

Some 28,000 Americans are sent to emergency rooms each year because of domestic violence. Almost 20 people are victimized each minute. This isn't a fringe issue: It claims far more American lives than terrorism. The White House would never be caught with a bank robbery suspect on its staff, so why tolerate someone alleged to be a wife beater?

The answer has to do, I think, with a lack of integrity, an absence of a moral compass, a narcissism in which the all-consuming

need becomes to protect oneself and one's boss.

Lack of integrity may also be the best way to capture the morphing scandal of the pre-election \$130,000 payoff to a porn star to apparently keep quiet about an affair with Trump. It's bad enough that Trump appears to have been cheating on Melania right after she had their baby ("Oh, don't worry about her," he is said to have told the actress).

But with the payoff and reported cover-up, Trump is betraying all of us. When *The Wall Street Journal* first reported the porn-star payout by Michael Cohen, Trump's longtime lawyer, Cohen denounced the report as a "false narrative" of "outlandish allegations."

Oops. Take two. This week, Cohen confirmed the payment in a statement saying that he "facilitated" the transfer with his own cash. It doesn't seem quite true, as some news organizations reported, that Cohen precisely denied that he had been reimbursed. Cohen's statement was artful. He denied that he had been reimbursed by either the Trump Organization or the Trump presidential campaign but not that he had been reimbursed by someone else — say, by Trump himself. (The White House did not respond to my inquiry about whether Trump had personally paid the \$130,000.)

Sometimes politicians, liberals and conservatives alike, are unprincipled in pursuit of principles they are passionate about. But Trump aides don't seem to believe in any cause larger than themselves or their leader.

That's alarming because of the risks that even worse might lie ahead. When self-absorbed people are caught in a growing scandal, they overreach. In this case, that might mean the firing of Robert Mueller or Rod Rosenstein, or some military clash that changes the subject. To be clear, I don't think officials would deliberately turn to war as a solution to political problems, but we all have a remarkable ability to persuade ourselves that what is good for us is also good for the country.

Every administration suffers embarrassments. But when there is a basic lack of integrity at the top, these do not easily self-correct; rather, they build upon themselves because of an impulse to cover up and layer new deceptions on top of old deceit. That seems to be what is happening in both the Rob Porter and porn-payoff scandals.

The risk is that this stain continues to spread, metastasizing and bringing down everything around it. And to me, it looks as if the Trump administration is now metastasizing.

■
Nicholas Kristof grew up on a sheep and cherry farm in Yamhill. Kristof, a columnist for The New York Times since 2001, won the Pulitzer Prize two times.



YOUR VIEWS

Pendleton projects moving forward without incentives

The trend in housing starts in Pendleton appears to be moving in a positive direction as new single family homes under construction are built without a 25 percent or 40 percent grant from the city. Those are the amounts of assistance available to or requested by property owners from the city for projects downtown to create additional housing.

I decided to sit in on the Pendleton Development Commission Advisory Committee meeting in an effort at getting up to speed on the city's progress in their efforts to increase housing in the urban renewal district.

The feeling of city officials is that boosting the available downtown housing will encourage tenants to shop downtown rather than the Melanie Square/Safeway/Walmart area. I guess if you need a new custom cowboy hat, boots or perhaps a saddle, and have no desire or need to cook, or a convenient place to park, they believe this is the place for you.

I questioned the absence of city-owned property in the urban renewal district on their list of available property considered keen for development. An example of an empty city-owned property, the old DMV/warming center, was given. It could easily be demolished, perhaps even giving the Fire Department some training, sold for residential development, and returned to the tax rolls, a win for both the city and taxpayers. The committee chairman indicated their emphasis should be on getting the most bang for the buck on each investment.

This looked to me like the perfect project, all bang and no buck. The Ward 1 city councilor, also representing the Urban Renewal District, seemed uninterested, explaining that all investments needed to be in the downtown area.

The Edwards Apartments building

as well as others in the district beg for demolition.

Perhaps it's time for an ordinance rewrite allowing the city to act aggressively allowing seizure, demolition and redevelopment. Perhaps that \$3-plus million in their war chest would be better spent on such projects, and loans versus grants made available to downtown building owners for remodeling.

How about taking a page from the Hermiston High School? They build houses. Make some of that vacant city property available for housing projects, giving PHS students the same opportunity.

The efforts by the city to promote new construction seem to be working. It makes the case that you don't need a big giveaway for progress on the housing front.

Rick Rohde
Pendleton

To be fair, all pollution should be taxed

I see our neighbors in western Oregon are deeply concerned about greenhouse gases and how to tax the producers. The primary tax should be levied on the citizens of Oregon, as we pose a serious threat to the environment.

A belch releases carbon dioxide, while flatulence releases a volume of methane. The tax should be three-tiered: 20 cents daily from birth to 20 years of age, 30 cents daily from 21 to 55 years of age, and 45 cents daily for ages 56 and older. Taxes using this structure would cost the most serious offenders a proportionate share of the burden.

This tax could be the first step in returning Oregon to the pristine environment that existed prior to the arrival of humans.

Mike Mehren
Hermiston