

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Kitzhaber has no excuse for lapse in ethics

Former Gov. John Kitzhaber and the state ethics commission agreed: He did not intend to break Oregon’s ethics laws. But to quote a Latin maxim, “Ignorance of the law excuses no one.” And that is where Kitzhaber and the ethics commission disagree.

Kitzhaber may not have intended to use his official position to financially benefit himself or his fiancée, Cylvia Hayes. But he did too little to prevent conflicts of interest – real or perceived. The Oregon Government Ethics Commission voted unanimously to accept 10 preliminary findings that he committed ethics violations.

Three years after Kitzhaber resigned as governor amid the ethics turmoil, other federal and state investigations have ended without charges. Instead, the controversy has come down to these 10 alleged civil violations. And even a commission investigator squirmed over one – whether Kitzhaber unwittingly benefitted from frequent flier upgrades.

Most of the allegations revolve

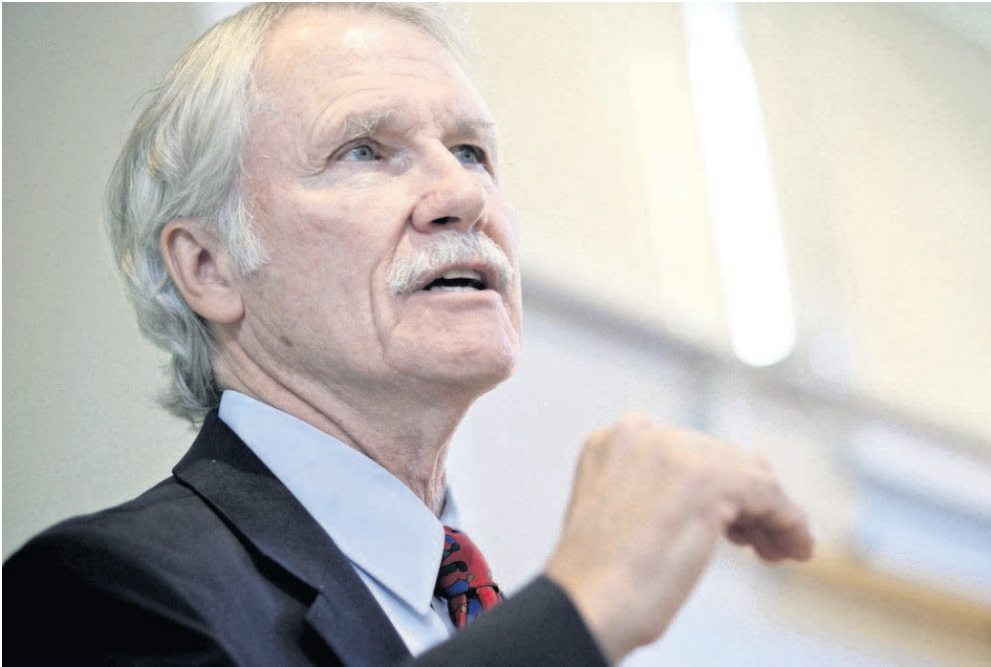
around Hayes’ unique position. This likely was the first time a first lady served as an official policy adviser to her partner, the Oregon governor. At the same time, she continued her private consulting work, often on the same issues as Kitzhaber was pursuing.

She erred by intertwining her roles. He erred by allowing that to happen, as he conceded to the ethics commission.

Kitzhaber’s contrition is belated but welcome. Still, he doesn’t seem to fully “get it.” Like many powerful people, he has fallen into the trough of certitude, believing his integrity invincible.

“I have withstood the scrutiny of eight elections and 26 years in public office and this is the first time that my integrity has ever been questioned,” he told the ethics commission. “I have certainly made my share of mistakes but using my office for the purpose of obtaining financial gain or avoiding financial detriment is not one of them.”

In the previous century, such certitude undermined another well-known



AP photo

John Kitzhaber

Oregon politician – former governor and then-Sen. Mark O. Hatfield. He, too, initially treated allegations of ethical missteps – ones involving his wife’s business, his family finances and his acceptance of gifts – as unwarranted assaults on his character. He, too, later recognized his lapses in judgment and sought to make amends.

The Kitzhaber and Hatfield cases are

not parallel in facts and magnitudes but in the mistaken faith in one’s ethical infallibility.

Kitzhaber’s transgression was not what he did. It was what he didn’t do: Establish and protect strong ethical walls separating his fiancée’s public and private roles.

That failure cost him his governorship.

OTHER VIEWS

What poisons are in your body?

Before I tell you about my urine, let me stress that it should have been clean.

Almost a decade ago, I was shaken by my reporting on a class of toxic chemicals called endocrine disruptors. They are linked to cancer and obesity, and also seemed to feminize males, so that male alligators developed stunted genitalia and male smallmouth bass produced eggs.

In humans, endocrine disruptors were linked to two-headed sperm and declining sperm counts. They also were blamed for an increase in undescended testicles and in a birth defect called hypospadias, in which the urethra exits the side or base of the penis rather than the tip.



NICHOLAS KRISTOF
Comment

were switching to BPF even though it may actually be yet more harmful (it takes longer for the body to break it down). BPF is similar to that substance that made those mice do back flips.

“These types of regrettable substitutions — when companies remove a chemical that has a widely known bad reputation and substitute a little-known bad actor in its place — are all too common,” Rudel told me. “Sometimes we environmental scientists think we are playing a big game of Whack-A-Mole with the chemical companies.”

Sigh. I thought I was being virtuous by avoiding plastics with BPA, but I may have been causing my body even more damage.

The scariest horror stories are found in urology journals.

Believe me, the scariest horror stories are found in urology journals. If you’re a man, you don’t wring your hands as you read; you clutch your crotch.

So I’ve tried for years now to limit my exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals. Following the advice of the President’s Cancer Panel, I eat organic to reduce exposure to endocrine disruptors in pesticides. I try to store leftover meals in glass containers, not plastic. I avoid handling ATM and gas station receipts. I try to avoid flame-retardant furniture.

Those are all common sources of toxic endocrine disruptors, so I figured that my urine would test pristine. Pure as a mountain creek.

Silent Spring Institute near Boston, which studies chemical safety, offers a “Detox Me Action Kit” to help consumers determine what harmful substances are in their bodies. Following instructions, I froze two urine samples (warning my wife and kids that day to be careful what food they grabbed from the freezer) and Fed-Exed them off for analysis.

By the way, the testing is for women, too. Men may wince as they read about miniaturized alligator penises, but endocrine disruptors have also been linked to breast cancer and gynecological cancers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists warns women that endocrine disruptors can also cause miscarriages, fetal defects and much more.

As I waited for the lab results, I continued to follow the latest research. Laura Vandenberg of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, sent bizarre video of a mouse exposed to a common endocrine disruptor doing back flips nonstop, as a kind of nervous tick.

Finally, I heard back from Silent Spring Institute. I figured this was a report card I had aced. I avoid all that harmful stuff. In my columns, I had advised readers how to avoid it.

Sure enough, I had a low level of BPA, best known because plastic bottles now often boast “BPA Free.”

But even a diligent student like me failed the test. Badly. I had high levels of a BPA substitute called BPF. Ruthann Rudel, a toxicologist who is the head of research at Silent Spring, explained that companies

possibly from a floor finish, which may be “neurotoxic.” Hmm. Whenever you see flaws in my columns, that’s just my neurotoxins at work.

Will these endocrine disruptors give me cancer? Make me obese? Make my genitals fall off? Nobody really knows. At least I haven’t started doing random back flips yet.

The steps I took did help, and I recommend that others consult consumer guides at ewg.org to reduce their exposures to toxic chemicals. Likewise, if I had downloaded the Detox Me smartphone app, I would have known to get rid of those mothballs, along with air fresheners and scented candles. (Science lesson: A less fragrant house means cleaner pee.)

Yet my takeaway is also that chemical-industry lobbyists have rigged the system so that we consumers just can’t protect ourselves adequately.

“You should not have to be a Ph.D. toxicologist to be safe from so many of the chemicals in use,” Dr. Richard Jackson of UCLA told me. “So much of what we are exposed to is poorly tested and even less regulated.”

The Trump administration has magnified the problem by relaxing regulation of substances like chlorpyrifos, Dow Chemical’s nerve gas pesticide. The swamp has won.

So the saddest lesson is that even if you understand the peril and try to protect yourself and your family — as I strongly suggest you do — your body may still be tainted. The chemical companies spend tens of millions of dollars lobbying and have gotten the lightest regulation that money can buy.

They are running the show, and we consumers are their lab mice.

■

Nicholas Kristof grew up on a sheep and cherry farm in Yamhill. Kristof, a columnist for The New York Times won the Pulitzer Prize two times, in 1990 and 2006.



YOUR VIEWS

Keeping a close eye on Trump Administration

In a university history class before World War II, one of our professors remarked that some day the United States would be fighting wars all over the world. We may be close to that time, although the President boasts we have peace in the Middle East. It is doubtful the people there would agree with him.

Our need to monitor the Trump Administration has become a daily significant development. And not only Trump, but his opportunistic satellites: Kushner, Donnie Jr., and Rob Bishop under Ryan Zinke, who can’t seem to control his assistants.

The recent reduction of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante monuments was a “done thing,” for the oil and gas companies with Bishop behind them.

We are at a time when species, wildlife, and habitat are seriously facing stress from population growth, habitat fragmentation, and climate change. Unless decisions made now are thoughtful and strategic a lot of danger will be done to our public resources.

I mean land, water, and air.

The occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge is only the beginning. We need to be constantly aware of plans (and sly moves) Rob Bishop and Secretary of Interior Ryan Zinke make, as well as what the President tweets when he wakes up every morning.

Dorys C. Grover
Pendleton

Family thankful for return of Indian heirlooms

Last May my family and I took a big loss regarding our family Indian heirlooms. The history of this regalia that was stolen was gauged at well over 100 years old and worth thousands of dollars.

There were many pieces that belonged to my late mother, whip-woman for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla-Walla Walla-Cayuse Tribes and the Pendleton Round-up and Happy Canyon, Anna Jane

Wilkinson Pond. She was a third generation whip-woman following her mother in 1958, the late Margaret White (bird), and Anne Johnson since 1911.

This role includes a distinctive Indian perspective: leading, translating ritual and ceremony, and lastly the discipline of the Indian dancers pertaining to all Indian events, Indian celebrations and Indian trade.

Many former Indian princesses, Indian beauty contestants and Indian horse riders paraded with this Indian regalia since 1916. Her buckskin dress dates back to the first champion of the American Indian Beauty Contest, Eliza Bill, and later the dress was given in an Indian trade to my father’s Indian wedding, when my mother married my father, Dr. Ron Pond, in 1959. It had been used by many Happy Canyon princesses and their tryouts for the night show for many years.

Our family is very thankful for the thousands of people on social media and the outpouring of well wishes, and all who shared the gallery of photos of artifacts that were missing ... revealed in the *East Oregonian* last May.

Most notable are those who worked diligently to recover our family heirlooms: Tribal Police Officer Dave Williams, Mrs. Tom Melton, Pendleton Police Officer Byram and Mort Bishop III.

I hoped to send in the names who had reached far and wide with social media, and those who worked from the onset of our loss until recently when most everything had been returned to the our family.

We have high hopes to build some kind of task force and/or database to provide some support for all those who might have Indian regalia stolen/taken.

We have knowledge that the Antiquities Act of 1906 and the Native American Graves Protection Act of 1991 are intact to enable many of our antiquities to be returned to our Indian families.

If there is anyone who witnessed this crime, please report this to the proper authorities

Lona I. Pond
Pendleton

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