

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Misplaced priorities

As the state legislature wound to a close, the powerful Joint Ways and Means Committee — the group of legislators who control a big pot of money — wrote a bunch of checks.

Luckily for Eastern Oregon and District 57, Rep. Greg Smith — the nine-term House Republican — is on that committee. He was able to secure more than \$7 million for projects in and relating to his district, everything from construction projects at Camp Umatilla, Oregon Food Bank projects in Eastern Oregon, the Center for Prevention Research and the Oregon Psychiatric Access Line program. That's not to mention \$9 million for an Eastern Oregon University facility outside his boundaries, which he had a part in securing.

Smith also helped direct \$1 million to the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce, just days after that organization honored him with a newly-created "Nobel Laureate" award. It has the appearance of a back-scratching kind of relationship that could rub everyone else the wrong way.

Perhaps \$1 million to build an office and larger conference room for the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce isn't a complete waste of taxpayer money. But it's hardly a priority when measured against the fact that the ill-equipped and dangerous Umatilla County Jail went unfunded, despite asking for the same

dollars. If local voters had their choice on which project to invest in, our guess is the jail would win in a landslide.

There are many reasons, however, that the jail did not secure the funds. Maybe Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan and County Commissioner George Murdock hatched this plan too late. Maybe Rowan and Sen. Bill Hansell did not make an impact with testimony before the subcommittee. Maybe it's simply because the committee's *raison d'être* is to make investments that create economic development, and mental health upgrades don't directly fit the bill.

Rep. Greg Barreto, who represents Pendleton where the jail is located, took little to no ownership in the project. Voters deserve some blame then, too, for electing someone to represent them who has little ability or desire to assist.

Whew. That's a lot of maybes and blame to go around. And we all feel it.

But we must acknowledge the facts. Many on these powerful committees have never visited Umatilla County, much less its overcrowded jail.

They rely on presentations and connections, and those outside District 57 must do better at both.

We're not naive: Glad-handing and horse trading are part and parcel in politics. But we must try to make the process of funding capital projects fair and equal.



Photo courtesy Eastern Oregon University

Artist's rendering of the \$9 million fieldhouse and event center planned for Eastern Oregon University, paid for by the state of Oregon.

In the last five years, Pendleton's convention center has seen two direct competitors pop up to the east and west. EOU in La Grande recently received \$9 million from the state and EOTEC in Hermiston received roughly \$7 million from the state and federal government. At the same time, Pendleton's event space has been supported on the backs of local taxpayers and a tax on hotel stays.

That's a clear example of government creating winners and losers on an unfair economic playing field.

Pendleton, and others municipalities in Eastern Oregon, deserve better from its state government and its representatives.

"I hope that when they get to the end of the session and there's money

laying around that they stick their hand up and ask for it. Because we need it," said Pat Beard, director of the Pendleton convention center.

Rep. Smith is good at his job. He uses his connections in Salem to benefit his district. He has a well-earned advantage and he makes the most of it. He even threw in a brief pitch at the end of the capital committee hearing on behalf of the jail, which is in a neighboring district but would clearly benefit his constituents.

But advantages misused have plenty of negative consequences. Even Rep. Smith's district is not served by the fact that the chamber of commerce is getting shiny new office space, yet mental health services continue to go unaddressed in Umatilla County.

OTHER VIEWS

Donald Trump's most casually broken promise

Politicians break campaign promises all the time. Some are big promises; some are small. But few have been broken as completely, as brazenly, and as casually as Donald Trump's promise not to play golf, or at least not to play a lot of golf, as president.

Candidate Trump told campaign crowds many, many times that a President Trump would be so busy serving the American people that golf would be out of the question.

"I'm going to be working for you," he told a campaign rally crowd in August 2016. "I'm not going to have time to play golf."

"I love golf, but if I were in the White House, I don't think I'd ever see Turnberry again," he said in February 2016, referring to the famous course he owns in Scotland. "I don't think I'd ever see Doral again," he added, referring to the famous course he owns in Miami. "I don't ever think I'd see anything — I just want to stay in the White House and work my ass off, make great deals, right? Who's gonna leave?"

It hasn't turned out that way. As president, Trump has not only found time to play the occasional round of golf — he has found time to play lots of golf.

The White House is not particularly forthcoming about what the president does when he visits one of his golf courses, so it is not possible to say with absolute certainty how many times he has played. "No word on the president's activities at the golf club," read one recent White House pool report on a visit to the Trump International Golf Club in Florida.

But Trump has visited one or the other of his golf properties about 100 times so far, often on beautiful days. On the assumption that when the president visits a golf course on a beautiful day, he is there to play golf, it's reasonable to guess that most of those 100 visits to golf properties involved playing at least a few holes.

Whatever it is, it's a significantly faster clip than predecessor Barack Obama's golf numbers. By a count from CBS's Mark Knoller, a keeper of presidential records, Obama played 29 rounds in his first year in the White House. But Obama sped up; according to Knoller, he played 64 rounds in 2016, his last full year in office. Obama's total for two terms was 333 rounds of golf.

Although it's impossible to say for sure, Trump's first-year total could be in the ballpark of Obama's final-year total. The problem for Trump, of course, is that he slammed Obama repeatedly for playing so much golf.

"He played more golf last year than Tiger Woods," Trump said of Obama in

December 2015.

"He's played more golf than most people on the PGA Tour, this guy," Trump said in November 2016. "What is it, over 300 rounds?"

Trump was not the only critic of Obama's golf habits. There were others — like me. During the Obama years I often tweeted, sometimes with an edge of snark, about Obama's trips to the course.

In August 2011, I tweeted, "Obama motorcade leads reporters on winding drive to ... guess what? More golf."

In April 2012, I tweeted, "Obamacare in peril, hot-mic embarrassment, economy still terrible. For Obama, there's only one answer: golf."

In 2013, I tweeted, "Now watch this drive: Pretty amazing Obama would make big statement on Syria, then head straight to golf course. But that's what he's done." The now-watch-this-drive part was a reference to an infamous moment in the George W. Bush presidency in which Bush, beginning a round of golf, spoke to reporters on the first tee to denounce a foreign terrorist attack. With barely a beat in between, Bush segued to "Now watch this drive." The cringeworthy moment was featured prominently in the Michael Moore anti-war documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11*, and led to Bush's deciding to forgo playing golf for the rest of his presidency.

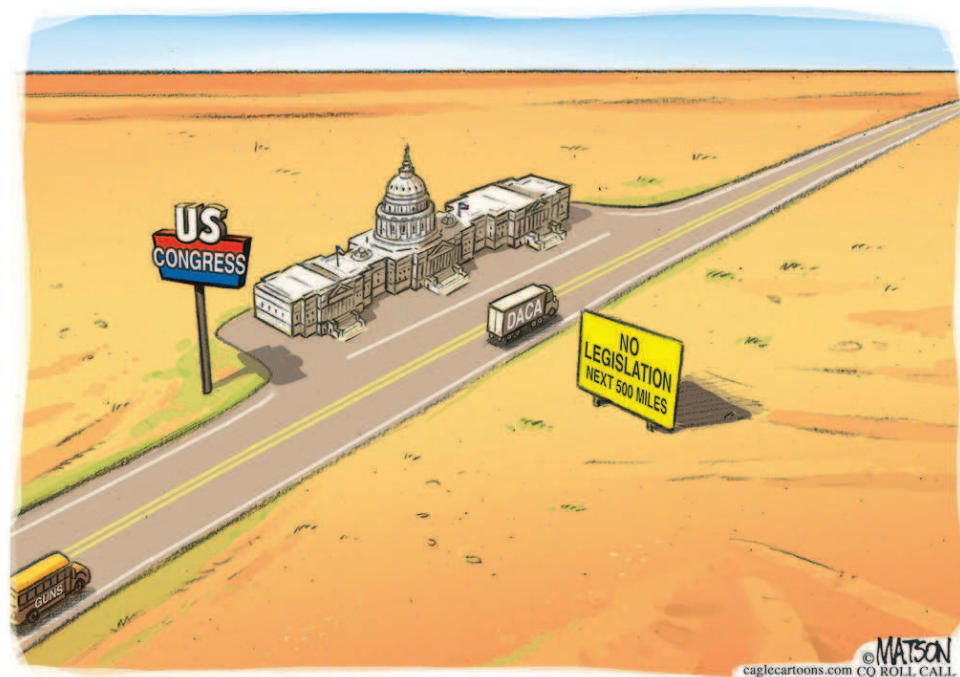
I noted Obama's golf so much because in the past many liberals had held Republican presidents to account for their golf — for their devotion to a supposedly rich-guy, country-club sport that revealed just how elitist and out of touch with ordinary Americans they were. In light of that, Obama's love of golf needed some attention, too.

Now, Trump's golf gets plenty of press. In literally the last 48 hours, it has been a feature of stories on CNN, the *New York Post*, Mother Jones, Pro Publica, Slate, Salon, the Daily Beast and more.

Trump made a point in November 2016 in which he noted Obama had played about 300 rounds. "Hey look, it's good," Trump said. "Golf is fine. But always play with leaders of countries and people that can help us. Don't play with your friends all the time."

It was the most moderate thing Trump said about Obama and golf. Now that he is president, Trump's golf is under near-daily scrutiny. Given the broken promise of the campaign, how could it not?

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



YOUR VIEWS

Demand change that reduces mass shootings

Another day in America — another mass shooting. I was appalled that after the deaths of six-year-olds at Sandy Hook, nothing changed in America's response to these tragedies. And now we are grieving those in Parkland.

We, the American people, expect that our representatives will sit together and agree to achieve this simple goal: Americans must stop dying at the hands of mass murderers.

I believe we have elected people that are talented enough to find answers that will make progress toward that goal. Until then, I realize that our new normal is not that deaths will happen, but only how high the number will be the next time.

On March 24, Americans across the country will be gathering to send a message to our legislators that this carnage must stop. Plan to be there.

Toni Lampkin
Stanfield

Witnessing what may have been a Japanese attack

The story of the Triple Nickles being sent here to fight forest fires caused me to reminisce about the Japanese balloons that were sent to start forest fires.

In late May 1945 I was 10 years old. My two younger brothers and I lived on the Oxbow Fish Hatchery in Cascade Locks. We witnessed a balloon pass over our home. Our parents were not there at that time. When they returned we told them what we had seen and dad contacted the Forest Service. They told us not to tell anyone.

The next morning our dad picked us up at school and took us to a secluded spot where we met three military officers. They

asked what we had seen. They especially wanted to know if we had seen anything hanging down from the bottom of the balloon. The answer was no. They wanted to know if we had told anyone. Again the answer was no. They said good because this was a war secret and we were not tell anyone.

Ten days later school was out. A fire broke out about 200 feet from our house. The flames were intense and they rose to a height of about 25 feet through the tree branches. Fortunately it had rained that day. Ten gallons of water pumped onto the base of the fire had no effect and it eventually went out.

Dad notified the military. After several trips taking samples of soil, fir needles and tree bark, their analysis to us was it was a new incendiary substance they described as "jellied petroleum."

Security about this was so important they didn't want us to tell anyone. That included the Forest Service, the fire department or the police. We later learned the newspapers had agreed not to publish anything about these balloons until after the war because they didn't want the Japanese to know they were successful.

Security about these balloons was so tight that they told the Forest Service the balloon we saw was a weather balloon. That is what they told us initially, but since it was a special weather balloon we were not to talk about it. When we had the fire, of course they had to admit it had been a Japanese balloon. The Forest Service did not want to be looking for them.

It would not have surprised me if the Triple Nickles were told they were here to fight fires and didn't know about the balloons. Security was that tight.

Carlisle Harrison
Hermiston

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