

Both Trump, critics find things to like in report

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and ERIC TUCKER
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WASHINGTON — A Justice Department watchdog report has turned into Washington's latest Rorschach test, with President Donald Trump and his critics each cherry-picking what they want to see from its findings to either discredit or defend investigators conducting the probe into the White House.

The 500-page report, which was more than a year in the making, offered a nuanced conclusion about the bureau's handling of the Hillary Clinton email probe, criticizing the FBI and its former director James Comey personally but not finding evidence that political bias tainted the investigation in the months and days leading up to Trump's election.

But Trump wielded it as a blunt instrument on Friday, bludgeoning the integrity of the Justice Department by pointing to the politically-charged communication

among FBI employees as proof that the FBI was biased "at the top level" and "plotting against my election."

"The end result was wrong. There was total bias," Trump declared Friday. "Comey was the ring leader of this whole, you know, den of thieves. It was a den of thieves."

Trump allies seized upon text messages between agents, pointing to one from August 2016 that said "We'll stop it" with regard to a potential Trump victory and another from a bureau lawyer that said "Viva le resistance." And Trump took it one step further, barreling out of the White House Friday for an unannounced, early-morning television interview that turned into a nearly hour-long freewheeling give-and-take with reporters, during which he returned time and again to assert that report had exonerated him amid Mueller's ongoing probe into Russian election interference.

"There was no collusion. There was no obstruction. The IG report yes-

terday went a long way to show that," Trump said on the White House North Lawn. "And I think that the Mueller investigation has been totally discredited."

But Trump's claim was baseless: the report made no conclusions about the president's involvement. But its criticism of Comey — levied by an inspector general appointed by President Barack Obama — is important to Trump as he tries to inoculate himself against accusations that he obstructed justice by firing the FBI director last May.

The president's lawyers want to paint the dismissal as something he was both authorized to do under the Constitution and correct to do based on Comey's performance. The White House initially said Trump fired Comey over his handling of the Clinton investigation, though the president himself later muddied that explanation when he said he was thinking of "this Russia thing."

The report did scold Comey for announcing his

conclusion that Clinton should not face charges, saying it was insubordinate and extraordinary that he would not have coordinated the statement with his Justice Department bosses. It also chastised him for announcing, again without Justice Department backing, that the investigation would be reopened because of newly discovered emails on Anthony Weiner's laptop.

Judgments on how the report would impact Trump's legal future predictably broke down along party lines.

Rep. Mark Meadows, a North Carolina Republican, said he thinks the report may exonerate Trump even though it passes no judgment on his guilt or innocence.

"If you look at the fruit of the poisoned tree, you can't have that kind of bias in somebody wanting to make sure the president gets defeated leading an investigation," Meadows said. "I don't think any of us would want our enemy investigating us."

But Sen. Richard Blumenthal, Democrat from Connecti-

cut, declared that "any effort to use this report as an excuse for shutting down the special counsel's investigation is both disingenuous and dangerous."

"Nothing in this report detracts from the credibility of the special counsel's investigation," Blumenthal said, "and nothing here suggests the special counsel investigation resulted from FBI bias or improper conduct."

Though the report doesn't validate all of Trump's claims, it does make clear that some employees involved in the Clinton and subsequent Russia investigation communicated to each other about wanting Trump to lose.

Much of the public attention has been focused on Peter Strzok, a seasoned FBI counterintelligence investigator who worked the Clinton investigation and was later on Mueller's team until anti-Trump text messages with an FBI lawyer, Lisa Page, were discovered and brought to the special counsel's attention.

Among the text exchanges that have been made public

is one from August 2016 in which Page said, "(Trump's) not ever going to become president, right? Right?!" Strzok responded by saying, "No. No he's not. We'll stop it."

Those text exchanges caused the inspector general to evaluate whether any of Strzok's decisions were affected by political considerations, and raised concerns that there was a "willingness to take official action to impact the presidential candidate's electoral prospects."

The watchdog office said it could not be certain that the decision to prioritize the Russia investigation in October 2016 over scouring the Weiner laptop for possible evidence against Clinton was free from bias. But the report also noted that Strzok was not the sole decision-maker and that he and Page sometimes advocated for more aggressive investigative steps than others in the Clinton investigation. His lawyer also issued a statement saying there was no evidence that Strzok's political views affected his actions.

SCHOOL: Students help translate for monolingual classmates

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Because of the short session, program coordinator Loretta Fitterer said teachers have to target specific concepts.

"At the lowest level it may be letter sounds," she said. "The next step may be sight words, and for older students it may be comprehension."

Kara Nichols, who has taught at the migrant education program for four years, said with her fourth grade class she is focusing on vocabulary, and on place value in math lessons.

She said she has taught the same group of students since they were in first grade, and has enjoyed the connection she's developed with them.

"The smaller size class makes it more personable," she said.

She added that language barriers can be a challenge.

"I speak Spanish, but I can't teach in it," she said. "I have to try to make sure their time is valuable."

For students who don't speak English, Fitterer said in addition to a math and reading goal, they will work toward an English goal by the end of the program.

"We work on prepositions, pronouns and verbs," she said. "We've had pretty good success with monolingual students."

She noted that in the last few years, they've seen an increase in students who only

speak a language other than English or Spanish, such as K'iche' or Mam, Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala and parts of Mexico.

Kyllian Wood, the seventh- and eighth-grade class instructor, said the students help each other out, too.

"There are three monolingual students in here," he said. "The rest of them are almost all bilingual, and they try and translate — that helps."

In the first grade class, students are working in small groups at five different stations on reading assignments. Some sound out words with the teacher, and some do a word recognition game called "smelly sight words," where they roll a dice, and the number corresponds with a certain color and word. They then use a "smelly" marker to write that word, helping them develop an association between the word and the number.

Students also complete assignments on a program called "Stride," which was created specifically for migrant education programs.

"They can continue to use it for the rest of the summer on their computer, laptop or even cell phone," Fitterer said. The program has lessons in math, phonics and science.

"Many of the families will go to Texas to sell Christmas trees, then migrate back here for asparagus, and over to Washington for apples," Fitterer said. "So the kids' instruction is interrupted."

She said the Stride program helps bridge that gap, allowing students to have some continuity in their education even if they are moving schools.

The day is split up, with about an hour a day devoted to reading and math. The rest is split up between science, Stride activities, and visits from local organizations and speakers. The final week will be devoted to cultural awareness, Fitterer said.

Wood praised the students' efforts to get the most out of class.

"They're really hard workers," he said. "In a short time period, we see a lot of growth."

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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Sixth-grader Oxiris Damian gives a suggestion to fifth-grader Sherlyn Estrada on how to make a boat out of tin foil during a science class for ESL students at Sunset Elementary School on Friday in Hermiston.



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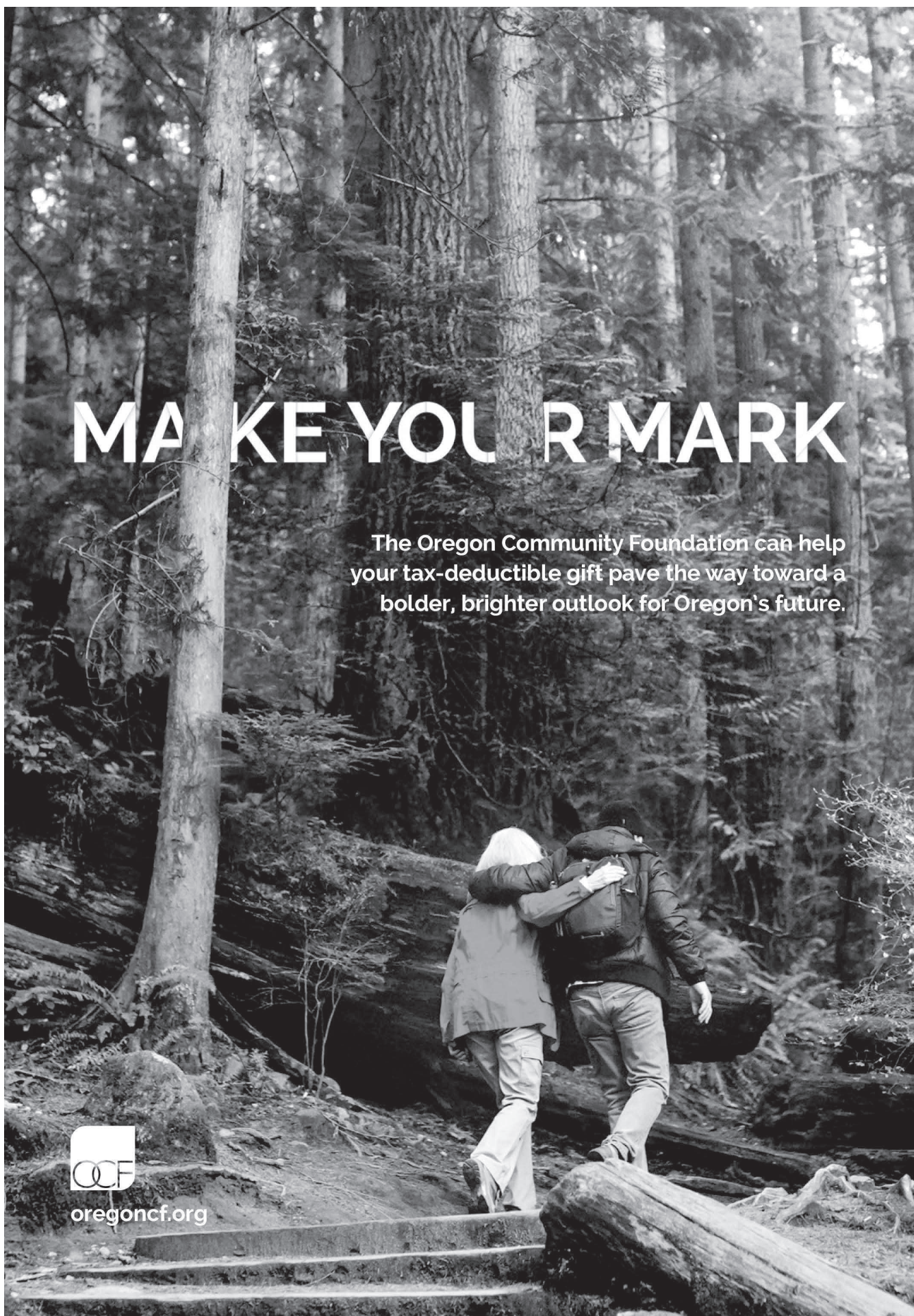
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