

Secret Service confidential

I am disengaged from politics because neither the Democratic nor Republican Party has ever convinced me that they are interested in working people, in an equitable redistribution of wealth, or will ever put an end to war. I am an informal member of the Birthday Party, whose platform is “Nobody for President” and whose button features a coat and tie with Nobody wearing them and slogans like “Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen,” “Nobody cooks like Mom,” “Nobody cares when you’re down and out,” and “Nobody is minding the store.”

But I do enjoy watching political candidates on television, particularly during the glad-handing crowd scenes after the speeches, because I like to play “Spot the Secret Service.” It is not a difficult game to master if you’ve ever cared for a wire-haired terrier on a Fourth of July evening. The Secret Service are the folks who surround the politicians and are programmed to expect that the sky will fall at any moment. Their eyes dart from side to side, up and down, waiting for the next Sirhan Sirhan or John Hinckley Jr., or some other wackoid creep to try to change history with a handgun. I would not want the job, even if I were between the ages of 21 and 37, a college graduate or retired military security personnel and had eyesight correctable to 20/20.

I play the game because, once upon a time, I was felt-up by a Secret Service agent. Enough time has passed that this can be told without recrimination to either the agent in charge or to any of the principals. A few names have been changed, just in case. The fondling took place in McCall, Idaho, in the summer of 2000.

It was either a good or bad fire season, depending whether you wanted to fight

fire so you could make payments on a new pickup truck. Everything northwest of McCall was on fire and even the Idaho National Guard was called in to try to quell the blazes. William Jefferson Clinton was in his second term as President. Apparently, he woke up one morning and felt the urge to fly to Idaho and shake the hands of the people who were fighting fire on the Burgdorf Junction Complex. Word that a real living President of the United States was planning to visit Central Idaho spread like, er, wildfire.

The night before his visit, I attended a potluck south of McCall at the home of four young filmmakers fresh out of Los Angeles. During the evening’s discussion, one of these young folks — a very flashy, Hollywoody and extremely well-proportioned Latina woman whom we will call Lupe — said that she would really like to see Bill Clinton up close. I said that we probably could make that happen, that I was a newspaper writer and should be able to muster press credentials that would get us up close enough to see Bill.

At 10 the next morning, Lupe, me, and my eight-year-old son were standing in the press line at the McCall Airport, awaiting the presidential helicopter. Around our necks were identification tags laminated with packing tape and hanging from shoe laces, verifying that I was a political journalist and that she was a photographer. I had loaned her a 35mm Canon. On the tops of every hangar were musclebound anti-sniper guys with rifles sporting barrels longer than mop handles and tripod-mounted binoculars that could’ve focused on Tahiti.

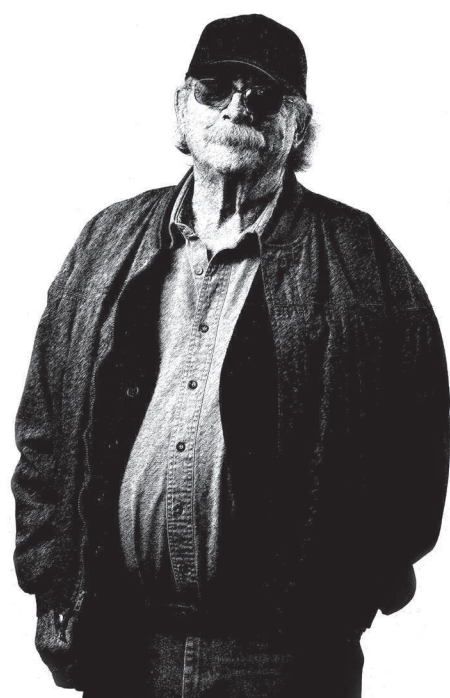
The Secret Service was in charge of processing us. When we made it to the front of the line, my son and I were ahead

of Lupe. A 30-something guy in a suit the color of a filing cabinet asked me to raise my hands above my head and proceeded to feel me up and down, even though it was obvious in my Wranglers and T-shirt that I was not packing much more than blubber. He glanced at my homemade ID tag, then asked me about the kid. I said that he was mine, a big fan of the president, and wanted to see a real live president — that he was part of the story I was going to write.

The guy actually whispered up his left jacket sleeve, just like on Saturday Night Live, tilted his head to the side as data came in over his little hearing aid, and then explained to me that kids were not allowed on the tarmac, for their own protection. Would we please step behind the police tape in order to allow the next person to be screened?

I was about ten feet away when he processed Lupe the Puerto Rican bombshell. That was when I realized that the next presidential assassin might be a beautiful woman. This guy who had gone through very vigorous training spent every day as a member of a totally masculine team flying all over the planet to protect our national assets. But he had little daily contact with women. Lupe was the girl from the calendar on his locker room door. Despite his dedication to his country, he could not bring himself to look directly at her, let alone determine with his hands if she had a .38 Special hidden in her 36 Special bra. He just glanced at the camera, then down at his brown loafers, and waved her on through to the presidential landing spot.

Five minutes later, three identical helicopters flew up the high mountain valley in a shifting formation like in the walnut



J.D. SMITH
FROM THE HEADWATERS
OF DRY CREEK

and pea game then came to ground on the northwest edge of the McCall Airport. The Presidential press corps poured out of the machinery to grab a quick smoke and William Jefferson Clinton stepped out onto the stairs of the Apache to wave at the crowd. There was Lupe, front and center, 15 feet away. She said he winked at her, but I have no photographic evidence. There was no film in the camera.

J.D. Smith is an accomplished writer and jack-of-all-trades. He lives in Athena.



Oregon DHS needs all hands to help children

Taking care of Oregon’s most vulnerable is at the heart of the Department of Human Services. To do that, we rely on thousands of incredibly caring people who work very hard under extreme circumstances to do their best. Our staff are on the frontlines in communities, ensuring the safety of vulnerable Oregonians.

For DHS leaders, safety starts with taking care of the people who take care of the vulnerable populations we serve. We’re doing that by thoughtfully expanding our workforce and improving the culture we do this difficult work within.

Our Child Welfare system has struggled with understaffing for years, but we are making changes for the better. Due to the generous support of the Governor and the Legislature in the last session, we are adding 186 new workers in phases between now and January of next year. The new, permanent positions show a true commitment to supporting our child safety work.

The phased-in approach was one the Legislature and the agency agreed upon due to both budgetary constraints and a strategy to stabilize our workforce. The commitment by the Governor and legislative leadership to find meaningful options for success during a 35-day session ensured that positions were phased-in for budget balancing and to allow the agency the flexibility in hiring the right people at the right time.

We recently finished hiring the first 25 of the new positions and are adding another 100 in July. We’ve expedited our personnel processes, and are recruiting and hiring at the earliest opportunity. We created a staffing approach designed to bring immediate relief to the offices with the greatest needs first. Our main focus right now is to ease the administrative burden on caseworkers so they can spend more time with children and families to create and sustain safety.

The first 25 people we hired into our new positions were case aides, a new role that quickly lifts paperwork and other tasks (like putting car seats in vehicles) from case workers so they have more time

with families. Just one case aide can make a huge difference in the life of a child, as they focus on the daily needs of a child and family, freeing up caseworkers to help families resolve the issues that put a child’s safety at risk.

At the same time we’re hiring new staff, we’re working hard to retain the talent we have now. We are rebuilding our agency from the bottom up, not the top down. We’ve traveled the state listening to our staff and families to learn how to make an impact quickly and long-term. It helps us ensure the changes we make are the right ones and truly meet families’ needs.

We’re already delivering on some of the tools and supports our staff asked for. We’ve deployed mobile technology to caseworkers, added internal consultants into local offices to provide expert guidance on complex cases, deployed rapid response teams to clear paperwork backlogs, and added the option of a short-form assessment that can be used only when we respond to abuse reports and find children are safe.

No matter what position someone holds in our child safety system, we’re all striving for the same outcome: Safe, healthy children who are loved and grow into adults who are healthy, productive, contributing members of society.

You can be part of helping an Oregon child grow into that adult. We can’t do it alone. Reforming the child safety system takes time, and it takes everyone in the community embracing our children. We’re making progress, and when our communities walk alongside us, the pace speeds up and the finish line gets closer. There are many ways you can get involved. To find the way to help that fits you best, go to www.helpafosterchild.org.gov. We welcome your partnership.

Marilyn Jones is a foster parent and an adoptive parent who became the Oregon Child Welfare Director in October 2017. Fariborz Pakseresht became the DHS Director in September 2017.



MARILYN JONES
Comment



FARIBORZ PAKSERESHT
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Loggers, wood manufacturing are keys to forest health

Arizona and New Mexico once had a vibrant forest products industry that contributed to the social, economic and environmental vitality of the region. That infrastructure disappeared as changes in federal forest policy all but eliminated timber harvesting from national forests.

Today forests in the Southwest are rapidly deteriorating as millions of acres have been impacted by catastrophic wildfire, insects, and disease. These conditions threaten watersheds, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and millions of homes. The U.S. Forest Service now struggles to reduce fire dangers and improve forest health because there are few logging businesses left with the personnel, equipment, and technical expertise required to remove the wood and fewer sawmills to process the fiber. This spring several national forests in the region have announced closures due to high fire risks, limiting recreational opportunities and tourism business for local communities.

This troubling situation is similar to the ongoing trend in Eastern Oregon. Local markets for wood will be lost unless active forest management is increased on national forests. This will be a problem not only for public agencies that need to treat millions of at-risk acres of public lands but also for private forest owners who seek to harvest timber or even salvage dead and dying trees from their own lands.

People in Eastern Oregon continue to express frustration with decreasing access into federal lands. Due to top-down decisions from Washington, D.C., the federal government has decommissioned and disinvested in its network of forest roads, and have dictated policies that don’t always align with the needs of local communities. This trust has been further eroded by the decline in timber harvests that help pay for road construction and maintenance. Not only have these decisions reduced access for residents and tourists, they’ve made fighting wildfires more dangerous and expensive.

There is some agreement among diverse interests, including those in the conservation community, that landscape-scale treatments are needed to protect the multiple benefits these public forests provide. As a result, considerable resources have been invested in promoting collaboration among multiple stakeholders to find compromise and reach

agreements on forest restoration. Years of hard work and millions of taxpayer dollars have also been spent on national forest plan revisions that, so far, have not signaled any changes from the status quo.

All of these public and private investments will be wasted, and the opportunity to restore these forests will be lost, if we continue to lose the people and local businesses that are capable of doing the work. No forest products business is going to invest in logging equipment, or maintain and modernize wood manufacturing facilities, without a stable and predictable supply of wood.

Changing decades of federal forest mismanagement will not happen overnight. A number of solutions are needed to restore eastside forests and protect the region’s remaining forest products and manufacturing infrastructure, including a balanced mix of stewardship contracts and open-bid timber sales that benefit everyone. We should also hope that collaboration finally begins to result in landscape-scale treatments that deliver both economic and conservation benefits.

The Forest Service should use all the existing policy tools to increase active management now. Oregon should expand the use of its “good neighbor authority” agreement, which would enable the Oregon Department of Forestry to perform management activities on federal lands, above and beyond what the Forest Service itself is capable of providing. We continue to need congressional action on solutions that ease the analysis paralysis and litigation that ties the hands of our public lands managers. To their credit, Oregon’s congressional delegation has been working to increase restoration and management on federal forests, and they need to hear our support.

For years people have been talking about the need to restore Eastern Oregon’s forests. It’s time for action, before more of the region’s forest products infrastructure has been lost. Otherwise what is now happening in the southwest will happen here.

Nick Smith is a member of the Oregon Society of American Foresters and Executive Director of Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization supporting active forest management on federally-owned forests.



NICK SMITH
Comment