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Tip of the hat, kick in the pants

A kick in the pants to Oregon’s Psychiatric Security Review Board for not only failing to protect the public, but for refusing to give an honest accounting of its work and then actively fighting to keep its secrets.

The board is tasked with reviewing cases involving criminals who are found guilty except for insanity and making sure they don’t pose a threat before releasing them back to the public.

A joint report by the *Malheur Enterprise* and the nonprofit news organization Pro Publica found 35 percent of people released committed another crime within three years. The PSRB was instead counting only those who remained under supervision, and presented a recidivism rate of 0.46 percent.

It turns out, the board pays very little attention to what its former patients do. *The Enterprise* first reported on

the case of Anthony Montwheeler, who was released from the Oregon State Hospital in December 2016 after convincing the board he had been faking mental illness for 20 years to avoid prison. The following month he allegedly stabbed his ex-wife to death in an Ontario convenience store and as he fled from police crashed head-on into another vehicle, killing the driver.

The small newspaper has aggressively reported the problems in the system, forcing the state to release public records and bringing the issue to light. It has shown that the board has talked about studying recidivism rates, and has even done some preliminary work that has hinted at larger problems. It has also aggressively fought transparency, including by suing the *Enterprise*.

Ultimately, the PSRB reports to the Oregon Legislature, and with a session just a few months away we hope to see



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Volunteers gather in a large circle to pray before starting the Community Fellowship Dinner Thanksgiving meal on Thursday in Hermiston.

these revelations lead to real change.

A tip of the hat to the generous donors of time and money who make our communities wonderful places to live.

From dropping a buck in the Salvation Army kettle to giving an entire holiday to prepare and serve a

meal, it takes gestures of all sizes.

There are, of course, too many individuals to mention by name. Many would prefer to stay anonymous anyway, content knowing their service is reward enough.

But consider this our thanks, and encouragement to keep up the good work.

OTHER VIEWS

Midterms a low point for undermining faith in democracy

For more than two years, voters have heard Democrats accuse Republicans of trying to undermine confidence in the American democratic system.

The charge was thrown about repeatedly in the 2016 presidential election, when Democrats said then-candidate Donald Trump’s contention that the election might be “rigged” would undercut faith in the system. Democrats, and many in the media, pressed Trump to promise to accept the election results. (When Trump won, the question was turned around, and Democrats were the ones who had difficulty accepting the voters’ decision.)

This year, during campaigning for midterm elections, some Democrats again charged that Republicans were trying to undermine the electoral system by suppressing the vote in key races. The talk was particularly intense during the governor’s race in Georgia.

Well before Election Day, Democrat Stacey Abrams accused her Republican opponent, Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp, of using his office to throw minority voters off the rolls.

“He disproportionately purged voters of color,” Abrams said on “The View” about a week before the election. “That’s problematic because, regardless of intent, the result is that racial bias has been injected into our system and undermines confidence in our democracy.”

After the voting, some of Abrams’ supporters openly accused Kemp of rigging the election.

“I think that Stacey Abrams’ election is being stolen from her,” said New Jersey Democratic Sen. Cory Booker.

“If Stacey Abrams doesn’t win in Georgia, they stole it,” said Ohio Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown.

“If she had a fair election, she already would have won,” said Hillary Clinton.

But even as Booker, Brown and Clinton spoke, Kemp’s lead over Abrams was in the tens of thousands of votes. By the final count, Kemp received 54,723 more votes than Abrams did.

Most Abrams supporters did not suggest that she actually won more votes than Kemp. Instead, they pointed to Georgia’s requirement that the winning candidate must receive more than 50 percent of the vote to avoid a runoff.

The Abrams scenario was based on the hope that somehow Abrams might find an additional 17,000 or so more votes, while Kemp got no more, and then Kemp, while still substantially ahead in total votes, would have less than 50 percent of the total. If that happened, there would be a runoff with Abrams.

The only problem was, the numbers weren’t anywhere close to what Abrams needed.

Still, the Abrams team insisted the vote



BYRON YORK
Comment

was rigged. “We believe that Brian Kemp mismanaged this election to sway it in his favor,” said Lauren Groh-Wargo, Abrams’ campaign manager. Kemp, she said, would “stop at nothing to undermine democracy and attempt to steal this election.”

Neither Abrams nor her supporters have presented evidence to prove their claim that there were tens of thousands of Georgians who wanted to vote for her but were disenfranchised by Kemp’s efforts. Most reports to that effect were anecdotal and simply suggested that there was a big Abrams voter bloc that was not being allowed to cast a ballot.

Specifically on the issue of voter names being removed from rolls, Georgia’s law provided for the state to send a letter to voters who have not voted in three years. If they respond, then they stay on the rolls. If they don’t respond, and if they don’t vote, they still stay on the rolls for two more federal election cycles — four years — before their names are removed. It’s a seven-year process, the kind that has been upheld as constitutional by the Supreme Court. Voters in the midst of that process could vote in the governor’s race. And focusing on the removals ignored the fact that Georgia’s voter rolls have been growing steadily, as has minority turnout.

After the voting results became indisputably clear, Abrams finally ended her effort, saying that under “the law as it stands,” Kemp “received an adequate number of votes to become the governor of Georgia.” But she refused to recognize the election result as legitimate.

Nor did some of her supporters. Indeed, if one sets aside the Russian effort to disrupt the 2016 election, the statements of Abrams and her supporters after the Georgia election stand as some of the most powerful efforts to undermine confidence in the American democratic system in recent years.

“This is not a speech of concession, because concession means to acknowledge an action is right, true or proper,” Abrams said in the speech in which she announced the end of her campaign. “Make no mistake: the former secretary of state was deliberate and intentional in his actions. I know that eight years of systemic disenfranchisement, disinvestment and incompetence had its desired effect on the electoral process in Georgia.”

With another presidential election less than two years away, such talk will only increase. And more Democrats will surely accuse Republicans of trying to undermine faith in the electoral process. But Georgia proved that Democrats have done plenty of undermining themselves.

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Trump slanders Khashoggi, betrays American values

Washington Post

President Trump on Tuesday confirmed what his administration has been signaling all along: It will stand behind Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman even if he ordered the brutal murder and dismemberment of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. In a crude statement punctuated with exclamation points, Mr. Trump sidestepped a CIA finding that the crown prince was behind the killing; casually slandered Mr. Khashoggi, who was one of the Arab world’s most distinguished journalists; and repeated gross falsehoods and exaggerations about the benefits of the U.S. alliance with the kingdom. Mr. Trump has betrayed American values in service to what already was a bad bet on the 33-year-old prince.

As with Russian President Vladimir Putin’s interference in the 2016 election, Mr. Trump is justifying his affinity for a brutal and reckless leader by disregarding the findings of the U.S. intelligence community. *The Post* reported Nov. 16 that the CIA has concluded with “high confidence” — a rating it does not apply lightly — that Mohammed bin Salman ordered the murder of Mr. Khashoggi, who while living in self-imposed exile in Virginia, wrote columns for *The Post* that were moderately critical of the crown prince.

Mr. Trump’s response is to grudgingly acknowledge that “it could very well be that the Crown Prince had knowledge of this tragic event” before adding “maybe he did and maybe he didn’t!” He declares the truth unknowable and thus irrelevant: “We may never know all of the facts surrounding the murder.”

In fact, the truth about Mr. Khashoggi’s death is not only knowable but largely known. Audio recordings in the CIA’s

possession record his actual killing as well as phone calls from the hit team to Mohammed bin Salman’s close aides. Five members of the team have been identified as probable members of the crown prince’s personal security team.

While discounting these facts, Mr. Trump bases his continued backing for the regime on false claims, including his thoroughly debunked boast that Saudi Arabia will “spend and invest \$450 billion” in the United States. He says the kingdom has “been very responsive to my requests to keeping oil prices at reasonable levels,” though Riyadh is reportedly preparing to cut production to raise prices.

Worst of all, Mr. Trump libels Mr. Khashoggi, saying that “representatives of Saudi Arabia” had called him an “enemy of the state” and a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. The crown prince did make those allegations in a phone call to the White House — but the regime itself was so embarrassed when *The Post* reported on the call that it denied making them. Mr. Khashoggi’s family has confirmed that he was not a member of the Brotherhood.

Mr. Trump concluded his statement by inviting Congress “to go in a different direction.” As in the Russia case, it must do so. Bipartisan legislation mandating sanctions for all those implicated in Mr. Khashoggi’s death is pending in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Chairman Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) last week gave us a statement indicating he wanted to know “what more would be done” by the administration before Congress responded. Now he knows. If Mohammed bin Salman is to be held accountable, as Mr. Corker said he must, the committee must act. The alternative is a world where dictators know they can murder their critics and suffer no consequences.

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