

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Brown deal leaves bad aftertaste

It is not a political scandal by any means, but the recent news Gov. Kate Brown spent a large chunk of public money to pay one of her former advisers to serve as a political consultant leaves a bitter aftertaste.

The news last week barely broke above the collective consciousness of the state and it certainly gained little traction in portions of the Willamette Valley, a traditional base for the governor.

At its heart the news revolves around a deal brokered in 2020 where the governor hired her former communications director Chris Pair through a no-bid state contract. The deal provides Pair with a salary of \$6,500 a month to attend weekly meetings of the Western Governors' Association regarding enlarging the effort to create infrastructure for electric vehicles. So far, the state has paid Pair \$91,000.

Brown also has paid Pair money through one of her political action committees.

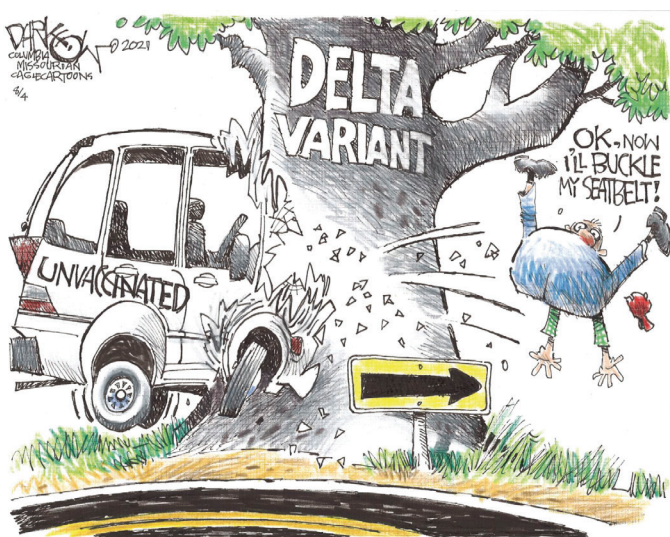
When Pair — a longtime member of Brown's staff — departed in January 2020, Brown made no mention he might be hired back. A month later, the governor's office asked state officials to prepare the no-bid contract for Pair's consulting company.

Now, on the face of it, none of this is illegal. In fact, former government officials turning around to work as independent contractors for their former bosses or agencies is commonplace. It just looks bad.

Transparency in government is essential for a democracy to function properly. That means the public has the right to know what its elected leaders are doing and why.

The money paid to Pair so far is, obviously, just a drop in the bucket of the multibillion-dollar budget of the state. But it is the principle that counts in this situation. If the governor was going to hire one of her former staffers and let him or her be paid with public dollars, she should have disclosed it. State government — and especially the governor's office — isn't a private company. It's funded by the public, and the public has a right to know — no matter how low the sum — how the government is using its money.

The governor didn't break the law, but bankrolling one of her former staffers on the public's dime doesn't sit well with us.



YOUR VIEWS

City transportation system needs an overhaul

A bus barn at the airport is the latest brainstorm to come out of Pendleton City Hall. They say the need has arisen for a storage building to house an accumulation of vehicles that city management has deemed essential for the operation of our public transportation system, vehicles paid for with various government grants they consider "free" money.

The vehicles are currently "stored" at city hall or at the local taxi company, 10 vehicles in all. The city contracts their subsidized services to the local taxi company. Those services include senior/disabled and general public taxi tickets, plus fixed and deviated bus routes. This is supplemented by the Clearview Disability Resource Center, which provides non-emergency medical transportation for individuals on the Oregon Health Plan.

City hall loves comparing our services to other cities, so let's take a look at Hermiston. Their services pretty much mirror ours. The difference is how they're administered.

All of their public transportation is contracted through third parties. Kayak Public Transit, operated by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, provides their fixed-route bus service. On-demand taxi service for all, including seniors, disabled and the "rides to work" program, is provided by Hermiston Transportation LLC, the local taxi company.

This is where the similarities end. Hermiston does not own any public

transit vehicles — no need for a bus barn. Pendleton, on the other hand, plans to construct a bus barn at the airport. How inconvenient is that? With office space included, I expect they'll be hiring a manager of some sort, so long-range costs are sure to exceed the planned \$90,000 for construction. That cost includes \$72,000 of "free money" provided by the state "transit tax." That's a new tax levied on employers and passed down to you in the form of increased retail prices.

City hall should be asking itself: Do we really need these 10 vehicles that require storage? When the CTUIR is the city's largest employer, why are we not reciprocating by taking advantage of the expertise in mass transit offered from Kayak? Why continue to waste tax dollars on new facilities when we can't maintain what we have?

How about investing in projects that enhance our economic future? Why not stick to those goals just announced by our city council? City management is already losing its focus with projects such as this bus barn fiasco.

Rick Rohde
Pendleton

River Democracy Act shows 'vision and determination'

Northeast Oregon connects the Rocky Mountains to the Blue Mountains, the Cascades and Coast Range beyond. Its waterways provide a habitat connectivity corridor of continental importance. Flowing from some

of Oregon's tallest peaks into deep river canyons, including Hells Canyon — North America's deepest — these waterways flow through deserts and wet forests rivaling the rain forests of the coast.

Ours is truly a landscape of superlatives.

Currently, only 2% of Oregon's 110,000 miles of rivers are protected under the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. That is why I was thrilled to read about Sen. Ron Wyden's call for nominations ("Nominate your favorite waterway for Wild and Scenic Act protection," The Observer, Dec. 16, 2019): "Whether you are a whitewater rafter, an angler or simply an Oregonian who believes strongly in protecting the river or stream that provides safe drinking water to your community, I want to hear from you."

Thousands of Oregonians from every county in our state answered that call by submitting more than 15,000 nominations of waterways to be included in the legislation.

Congress passed the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in 1968 to protect our nation's best free-flowing rivers, to ensure clean drinking water, to safeguard fisheries, and preserve cultural resources, scenery and outdoor recreation opportunities for all future generations. Our Northeast Oregon waterways do indeed provide many distinctive wildlife habitats, clean water and recreation opportunities that make our region so unique. I applaud the senator's vision and determination.

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