

Cover Oregon a failure at all levels

State government's recent action to dissolve Cover Oregon highlights yet again how woefully inept Oregon was at setting up its medical insurance exchange — incompetence of historic proportions.

It will go down as Oregon's biggest tech debacle ever, and you could exclude the word "tech" and still make a credible case.

The biggest debacle in Oregon government history? It is, as people like to say, in the conversation.

Cover Oregon has now cost \$300 million and did not benefit anyone. It signed not a soul up for health insurance. Heck, it didn't pave a road or build a bridge. We didn't even get to buy a Hawaiian island (like the one Oracle founder Larry Eillison purchased for \$300 million in 2012) or throw an epic statewide parade. That makes the failed exchange a terrible disappointment and a waste of money, without even mounds of ticker tape to show for it.

But while the Cover Oregon failure may be the bright, sticky icing on the cake, there is mounting evidence that the cake itself had plenty of its own problems.

Our state government failed us from the beginning. Now-disgraced governor John Kitzhaber was a strong proponent of President Obama's nationwide health care reform, and he advocated for Cover Oregon. Kitzhaber was always prone to big ideas, yet sported blinders on the details. Without a program manager, the buildout and preparation was poor.

It also came at a time when investigative reporting on the state capital was at an all-time low. There were few nagging journalists peppering Kitzhaber and the Cover Oregon crew with persistent questions.

Then came D-Day. The Cover Oregon rollout was a disaster, and it didn't take long before everyone was running for political cover. The hunky-dory ad campaign added insult to injury, almost advertising a blithe ignorance of the systemic flaws in the program.

Kitzhaber, preparing for his own re-election, was one of the first to duck and run. If you can remember (this was many scandals ago) he asked Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum to sue Oracle, the firm that was under a government contract to build the online exchange. And he campaigned to scrap the system that just months before he was promoting as proof of Oregon's genius.

Eventually, he won that argument. Cover Oregon was sent underground while the federal portal went into use.

Yet the indignities to the state continue. Oracle countered the state and two weeks ago sued Kitzhaber staffers, saying they advised the governor to trash the exchange not because it was systemically broken, but because that would be his best political move. The company is pretty much saying that Kitzhaber's staff acted against the state's best interest in order to get him re-elected.

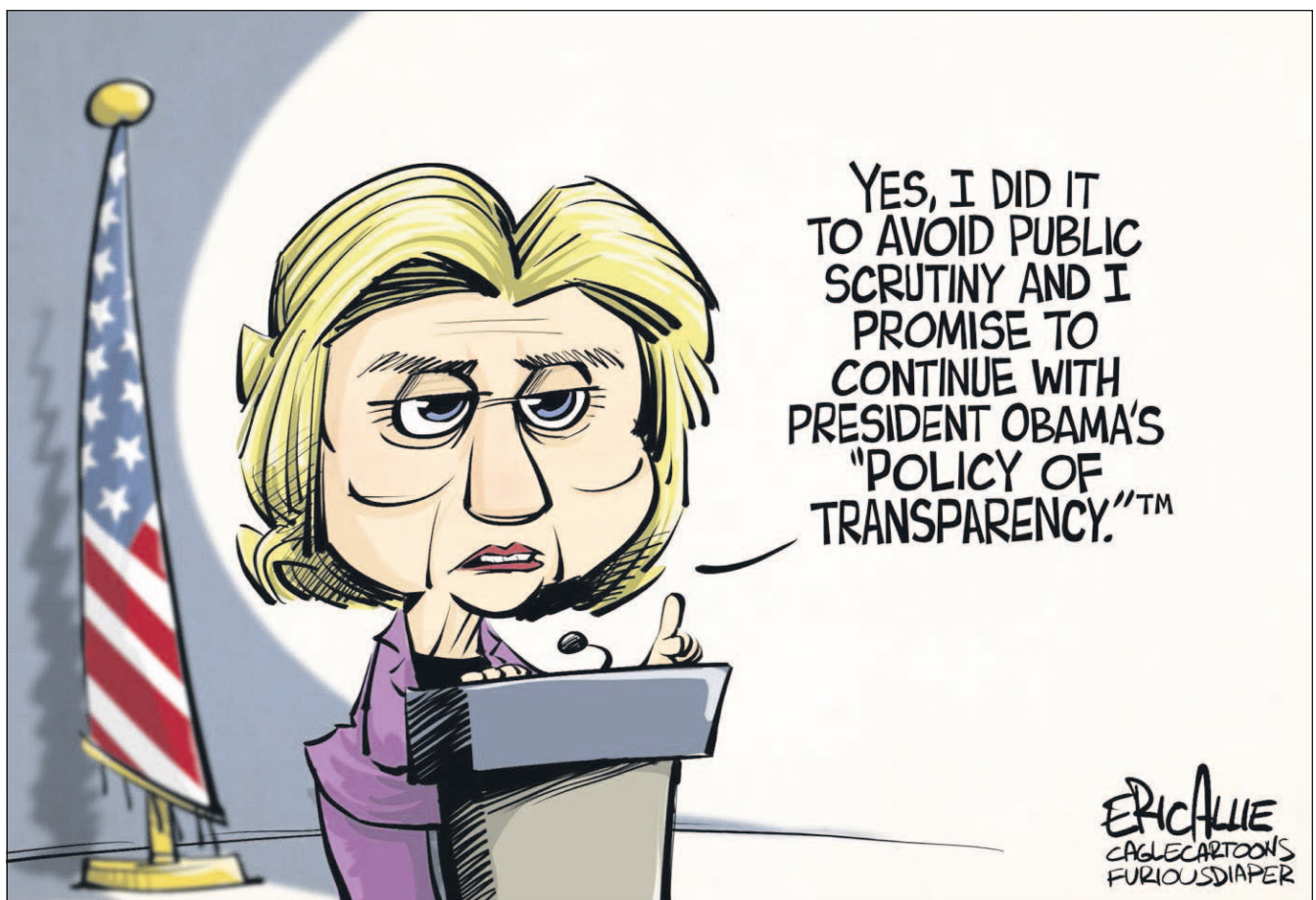
Emails leaked to The Willamette Week show Kitzhaber was well aware of what a political anchor around his neck the failed exchange was, and he wanted it off the front pages of newspapers across the state. What he and his political operatives did to make that a reality will be hotly contested going forward.

It's layer upon layer of questionable decisions. A total mess, followed up by a klutzy attempt at recovery.

We can only say, using the online lingo of the day: epic fail.

EDITORIAL

The voice of the Chieftain



Horses know who's not boss

By Rocky Wilson

JABBERWOCK II

At risk of being without toothpicks for eight days, missing a Zags game, or some other catastrophic event, I feel the need to admit I've not always loved horses.

Not a subject to be approached lightly in Wallowa County, I know.

Yet, I'll freely admit my aversion for the critters neither was from birth nor, as a whole, remains today. The defining moment when my personal pendulum regarding the equine species headed back in a positive direction came when I determined never to board another horse.

That decision made life much easier for me and any horse I might have intended to mount.

I didn't begin disliking horses. When a youth here, like many from Wallowa County, they'd place me on a gentle steed and, in the midst of a string of horses with riders and pack animals, we'd ride into the high mountains. I should have become alarmed, but didn't, when on one of those trips a teenager reached out, slapped the horse carrying his mother, and the horse bolted. I was maybe 10 years old at the time, yet remember watching as the horse carrying the teen's mother abandoned the narrow trail we were on and headed uphill. Anyone who's seen Steamboat Lake far below on

the trail heading to that large body of water has to know the mother was a skilled rider not to have been bucked off.

The thing I remember most about those days-long Eagle Cap excursions is how much faster the horses walked heading home than they did heading into the mountains.

My falling out with the species came when, probably like the teenager who slapped his mother's horse, I mistakenly thought I was boss over a borrowed horse and learned the hard way that horses are smarter than me. I remember myself and maybe three other guys borrowing horses for a late afternoon ride to Brownie Basin, up the South Fork of the Lostine. The others knew horses far better than I did and encountered no problems negotiating safe passage courtesy of their animals. I, on the other hand, felt the need to establish human dominance by kicking my horse in the ribs (no spurs, of course) and the dude put a "quit" to our joint venture, at least with me in the driver's seat, to Brownie Basin.

Would it be safe to say that I, a self-respecting teenager, was embarrassed be-

cause, while leading my horse by the reins on foot, I was unable to keep pace with my friends on horseback?

Like so many, my wife always has liked horses and treats them with respect. She tells me of times at an earlier age when, seeking solace, she would ride her horse to distant locales and fall asleep while enjoying the stars.

But many of my memories of horses are positive.

Decades ago while playing basketball on the island nation of Malta, in the Mediterranean Sea, teammates I became friends with were brothers. While visiting them and their parents one Saturday morning, the parents asked if I wished to accompany them to the sulky races. Always willing to try something new, I said "yes" only to learn they were official judges for races that attracted stadium crowds in excess of 20,000 spectators. After every race, a horse would pull the judges (my friends' parents) and me all the way around the track to confirm that no rules had been broken.

No big deal until I went to the grocery the next day and the owner, who'd seen me from the stands, called me rich for the first time in my life.

Go figure.

Jabberwock II columnist Rocky Wilson is a reporter for the Chieftain.

Cowboy could be goaded, deceived



out of it. If someone did get hurt, it was a bonus for Sonny.

Vintage kept some cattle out at the Bull Testing Station north of Oakdale on 26 mile road. Sonny sometimes worked for that outfit and got to know Kenneth. Kenneth left his jacket on the fence one day and the next morning Sonny spotted a small gopher snake by the fence as Kenneth came down the driveway. Since it was still pretty cool, Sonny easily caught the snake and put it in Kenneth's jacket pocket.

The unsuspecting Kenneth hopped out of his pickup and spotted his jacket on the fence. Since it was still cool, he put the jacket on and hopped on his horse to ride through the cattle. He had gotten about a hundred yards before his hands got cold and he put his hand in the pocket with the snake.

When he found the snake, he let out a scream while his horse broke wind and jumped ahead and sideways. Off he came, but managed to shed his jacket before he hit the ground. Sonny watched the action from inside the barn and got a huge kick out of it.

Kenneth picked himself up but left the jacket where it lay and collected his horse. Sonny said he didn't pick the jacket up for three days.

Kenneth was from Texas, but we didn't hold that against him. We did however make him an object of ridicule and scorn whenever possible. Kenneth had worked strictly for purebred operations and had a work ethic second to none. After he had been working for Vintage Angus for a couple of years, Jim Coleman the owner expanded by buying the old 9,000-acre Bloss Ranch near La Grange. This meant that Kenneth had to become a cowboy.

Kenneth was lucky that I got hired on as a day working cowboy for the outfit and could be a role model for him. I do have to say that he was a fast learner and after about ten minutes, with the help of Pedro, we had taught him all we knew.

Like all Tejanos, Kenneth had been brain-washed into believing Texas was the biggest, the best and just the greatest. We used to tell him Texas was just a good place to send cowboys that couldn't make it in our country. This would sully him up right now. The maddest I ever made him though was when I asked why they would celebrate Alamo Day in Texas when they had lost that battle? I then asked "and why would they name the streets in every small town, Bowie, Crockett, Travis, etc. after the losers that lost the battle?" This was too much for Kenneth. He whirled on me and said "If ya'll say one more bad thing about Texas, I'm gonna whip you." I informed Kenneth that age and viciousness would overcome youth and strength.

Sonny Turman had an overdeveloped sense of humor and really didn't care if anyone got hurt as long as he got a laugh

The Bloss ranch where we worked was right in the Mother Lode country and had a couple of small mines that had been worked in the 49er days. While out riding one day, I told Kenneth the history of the region and the Chinese ditch that was constructed on the western boundary of the ranch for placer mining. I told Kenneth that when he crossed any of the creeks after a rain to always look down into the water, as nuggets were often uncovered, especially after a storm.

A few days later, we were gathering a field of cattle and Kenneth was about a hundred yards off to my left and I knew he could see what I was doing. As I crossed a creek I slowed up and when I got to the other side I quickly dismounted and picked up a small rock from the edge of the creek. I gave it a look and pretended to bite it. I stuffed it in my jacket pocket and got back on my horse to ride off. Here came Kenneth at a full gallop. He slid to a stop and demanded, "What did you find?"

Nothing, I responded, I thought I saw an arrowhead. Kenneth wasn't satisfied. He just knew I had a nugget. Dammit, he said, we are partners and if you found gold, you should share it with me. I would with you. I assured him that I would share and that I hadn't found any. For the rest of the day, Kenneth was convinced that I had found a nugget and would pester me about it. After that, Kenneth never failed to examine any creek bottom he crossed.

Open Range columnist Barrie Qualle is a working cowboy in Wallowa County.

Roberts wrong on fladry, wolf loss pay

To the Editor:

Commissioner Roberts is wrong to describe fladry as only minimally effective in protecting livestock from wolves. Wolves in Wallowa County have never successfully attacked livestock protected by fladry, a fact the Commissioner ignores. Yet she and the livestock industry have never ceased calling for wolf-killing as the only solution to conflict, as if this is 1915 not 2015, as if Oregon is against and not in favor of healthy wolf numbers.

Commissioner Roberts is photographed next to \$6,000 worth of fladry, paid for by Oregon taxpayers in the expectation that it be used as a wolf deterrent, not a stage-prop for misinformation. Fladry is most effective during calving, which is right now, when cattle are penned in relatively small enclosures and

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most vulnerable. Yet rather than urge its use, Commissioner Roberts undermines the good intentions of Oregon taxpayers by maligning this effective tool. Following her lead, ranchers are risking their stock, and we taxpayers will bear the cost of compensation.

Now that direct losses have plummeted despite increasing wolf populations, indirect loss (i.e.: missing cattle) looms larger. Roberts says that compensation "could be small or nonexistent," but to date all claims have been met in full, and the funding application now being submitted includes full compensation for in-

direct losses.

Most missing cattle are lost on summer range, usually on public land where they're seldom checked and are vulnerable to predators other than wolves, to injury, disease, even theft since cattle prices have recently soared. Increasing claims for missing cattle are causing some conservationists to wonder if producers shouldn't be expected to absorb losses on public land. After all, they're getting a bargain rate at a fraction of the commercial grazing fee, and Americans value their wildlife and public lands at least as much as the rancher does his subsidized lease.

Wally Sykes
Joseph

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