

**Cottage Grove Sentinel**  
 116 N. Sixth St.  
 Cottage Grove, Ore. 97424

# Opinion

**The First Amendment**  
 Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

"I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." —Thomas Jefferson (1800)



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**Letters to the Editor Policy**

The Sentinel welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Letters that are anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or without documentation will not be published.

Letters containing poetry or from outside The Sentinel readership area will only be published at the discretion of the editor.

**Political/Election Letters:**

Election-related letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large.

Letters must: 1) Not be a part of letter-writing campaigns on behalf of (or by) candidates; 2) Ensure any information about a candidate is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay; and 3) explain the reasons to support candidates based on personal experience and perspective rather than partisanship and campaign-style rhetoric.

Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes; this constitutes paid political advertising.

As with all letters and advertising content, the newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher, general manager and editor, reserves the right to reject any letter that doesn't follow the above criteria.

**Send letters to:**

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## Mueller report could offer much-needed diagnosis of our ailing political system

will force us to take a hard look at just how ineffective and corrupt our political system has become — regardless of which side of the aisle you're on.

And while Russia's influence campaign

and "individuals" in elections — spawning Super PACS (Political Action Committees) that routinely raise hundreds of millions of dollars for candidates by holding events hosted by special interests, lobbyists and

ate of Manafort's with ties to Russian intelligence officials.

Though accusations of collusion, manipulation, money laundering, false statements and conspiracy are still being investigated through individual branches stemming from Mueller's report, they are merely symptoms of a political plaque that has been building in the arteries of our government for decades — and now threatens the very heart-beat of our democracy.

The special counsel's report could prove to be one of the most important in our nation's history, providing a diagnosis of what we need to know rather than what we want to know.

Only then can we begin to address the kinds of reforms needed to assure that the heart of our political system beats for its people rather than the pocketbooks of special interests at home and abroad.

*Write to Cottage Grove Sentinel Managing Editor Ned Hickson at [nhickson@cgsentinel.com](mailto:nhickson@cgsentinel.com)*

**From the Managing Editor's Desk**  
*Ned Hickson*

unquestionably played a role in the 2016 elections, it merely recognized a weakness in our system we have been unwilling to admit or change: A dependency on campaign funding from special interests, both financially and fundamentally.

In the 2004 general election, 95 percent of House races and 91 percent of Senate races were won by candidates who spent the most on their campaigns.

This has only become more prevalent since 2010, when the Supreme Court's "Citizens United" decision began allowing unlimited spending by corporations, unions

others hoping to benefit from influencing future legislation.

Tucked within the 2016 election were Russian special interests, beginning with Mueller's very first indictment in April 2018, when Dutch national Alex van der Zwaan was indicted for — and eventually pleaded guilty to — lying to federal agents about his contacts with Trump campaign deputy chair Rick Gates in September 2016.

In addition to his contacts with Gates, van der Zwaan was also connected to Paul Manafort and Konstantin Kilimnik, a Russian business associ-

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