

Opinion

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Foster care needs attention

Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

Oregon's child foster care program, run by the Department of Human Services, has critical problems that endanger some of the state's most vulnerable, as Oregonians learned from a state audit January 2018. While Oregonians deserved more action to address the situation during the 2018 legislative session, House Bill 3012 in the 2019 Legislature is a step in the right direction.

HB 3012 directs DHS to study ways to improve the foster care system and report back to the Legislature by September. By itself, that's a good step, but it can, and should, be made better. The bill focuses on reducing the number of children in care, reducing caseloads for those who oversee children in the program, and deciding how much money it would take to attract more would-be foster parents and reduce turnover rates.

It does not address structural problems within the department, however, and it does not require an independent contractor to study the system and base recommendations on what the contractor finds. Without carefully thought-out changes within the department, it's unlikely the system will get much better, and an independent study is more likely to be able to see and address problems those close to the situation might not. Lawmakers should consider amending HB 3012 to require an outside, not inside, look at the situation.

At least two other measures before lawmakers deal with the foster care system.

House Bill 3013 would grant free college tuition and fees to natural children of foster families. The grants would be calculated on a sliding scale — the longer a family had cared for foster children, the greater the percentage of tuition and fees covered.

House Bill 3015 would add former foster children who were adopted to a law granting college tuition and fees to foster children.

The state pays foster parents a sum that's less than what the U.S. Department of Agriculture says is the cost of raising a child in the western United States. That makes coming up with money for college for any children, natural, adopted or foster, difficult. Paying college tuition and fees helps assure those children won't be disadvantaged when it comes to higher education.

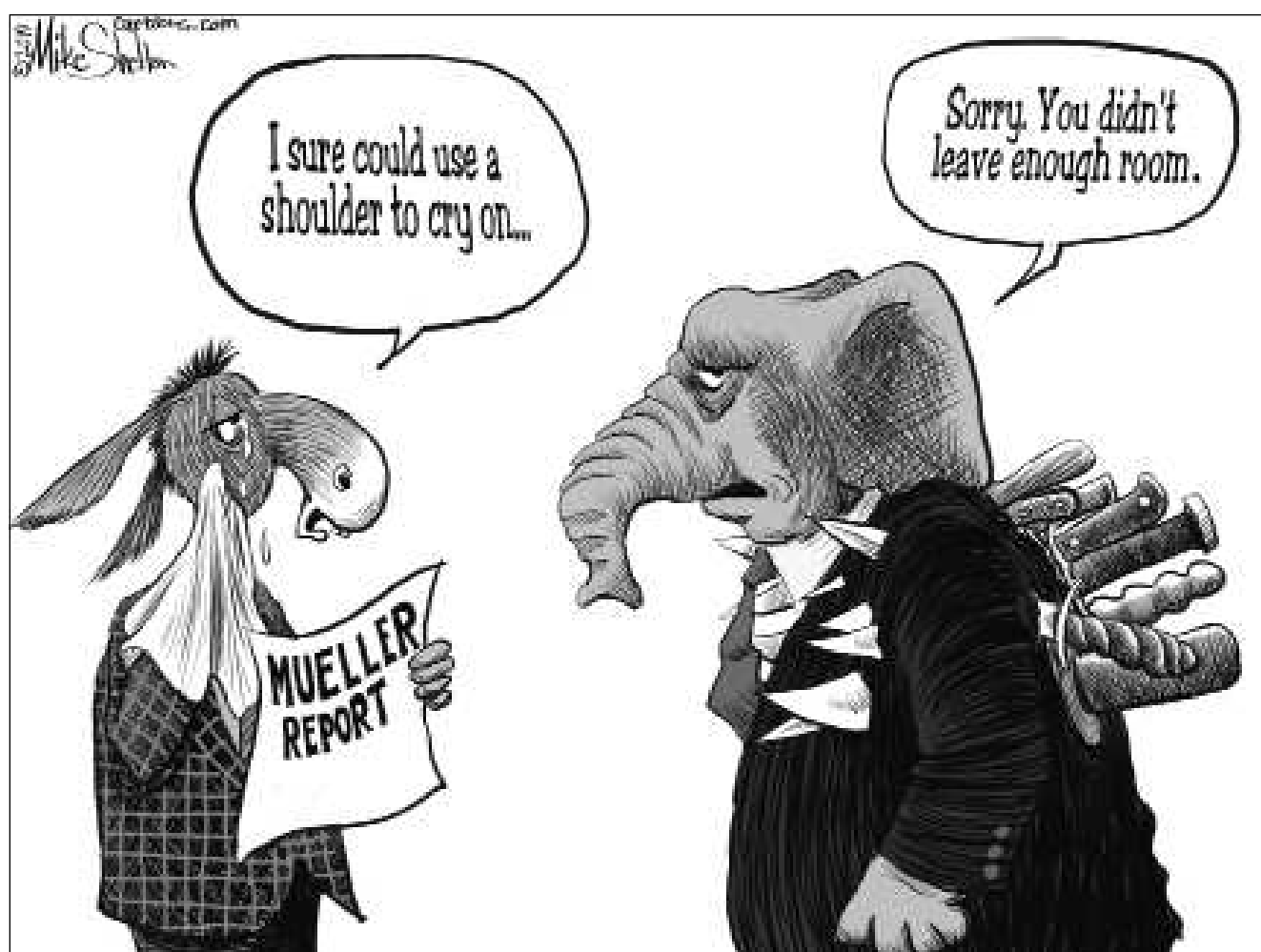
The Legislature should pass these three bills.

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Trump gets partial victory lap

President Donald Trump scored a significant political and legal victory on Sunday. Attorney General William Barr, in a brief summary of special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into the 2016 presidential election, said that Mueller has determined that Trump and his aides didn't conspire or coordinate with Russia in that country's efforts to sabotage the campaign.

Barr also said that Mueller hadn't uncovered evidence that Trump obstructed justice and that he and Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein also determined that the Justice Department wouldn't file obstruction charges against Trump.

He pointed out that both men arrived at that decision apart from special "constitutional considerations" that would have been involved in trying to indict a sitting president.

Barr's summary is outlined in a succinct four-page letter he sent to Congress late Sunday afternoon. Although the letter surely gives the president and his team reasons to celebrate, Barr also noted that Mueller hadn't completely absolved them of wrongdoing.

"While this report does not conclude that the president committed a crime, it also does not exonerate him," Barr said, quoting language from Mueller's report.

Trump, jubilant, took to Twitter on Sunday evening to celebrate. But afforded the opportunity to take a victory lap, he still couldn't avoid misrepresenting what the Mueller report actually said. "No Collusion, No Obstruction, Complete and Total EXONERATION. KEEP AMERICA GREAT!" he tweeted.

Barr also observed that the president may have acted to obstruct justice, but to convict him of obstruction "the government would need to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that a person, acting with corrupt intent, engaged in obstructive conduct." In other words, Barr and Mueller didn't believe that they could prove, in an airtight fashion, that Trump intended to obstruct justice when, for example possibly, he fired his former director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, James Comey, in early

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2017. (The fact that Rosenstein himself drafted a memo for Trump that the president used to justify his firing of Comey surely complicates how he might have assessed that event when reviewing the Mueller report.)

The letter would also suggest — though it doesn't list any examples of some of the more well-known episodes that surfaced before and during Mueller's probe that, for example, meetings in Trump Tower in 2016 involving Donald Trump Jr., Jared Kushner, Paul Manafort and a group of Russians offering compromising information about Hillary Clinton amounted to collusion.

What Mueller made of the president's apparent efforts to obfuscate about that meeting — or his dissembling about his company's efforts to engineer a business deal in Moscow during his presidential bid — will have to wait for further disclosures from the report.

Barr said he intends to "release as much of the Special Counsel's report as I can consistent with applicable law, regulations and Departmental policies." How much of the report Barr will make public is already an issue — and perhaps the source of coming political and legal conflicts — with Democrats in Congress demanding that it be released in its entirety.

"There must be full transparency in what Special Counsel Mueller uncovered to not exonerate the President from wrongdoing," Jerold Nadler, head of the House Judiciary Committee, said on Sunday. "DOJ owes the public more than just a brief synopsis and decision not to go any further in their work."

In what should be considered a rebuke to Mueller's critics who have, in various ways, accused him of being a Deep State operative engaged in what the president himself repeatedly referred to as a "witch hunt," the report appears to be a partial vindication for a president who has struggled in the

shadow of the investigation for most of his tenure.

"The Special Counsel did not find any collusion and did not find any obstruction. AG Barr and DAG Rosenstein further determined there was no obstruction," Trump's press secretary, Sarah Sanders, tweeted on Sunday.

Like her boss, she also couldn't avoid distorting what the Mueller report apparently said.

"The findings of the Department of Justice are a total and complete exoneration of the President of the United States," she observed, contradicting Mueller's own assessment.

Still, if the report conforms to Barr's description of it, then one of the president's favorite talking points — "No collusion!" — now has the added strength of federal law enforcement's endorsement.

Barr pointed out that Mueller's nearly two-year probe involved 19 lawyers, 40 FBI agents, intelligence analysts, forensic accountants, 2,800 subpoenas, about 500 search warrants, 50 authorizations of pen registers (a wiretap, essentially, that monitors telephone and digital communications), 13 requests for information from foreign governments and interviews with 500 witnesses (which, notably, did not include the president).

If Barr's letter represents the opening round of a cage match between the Justice Department and Congress over the Mueller report, it's certainly not the end of Trump and his family's intersection with law enforcement and possible legal jeopardy. As many as 12 known investigations continue to target the president's financial, business and political dealings, including those overseen by several congressional committees as well as federal and state law enforcement and regulatory officials.

Timothy L. O'Brien is the executive editor of Bloomberg Opinion. He has been an editor and writer for the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, HuffPost and Talk magazine. His books include "TrumpNation: The Art of Being The Donald."

GUEST EDITORIAL

Lawmaker wants to take guns from some campus police

Editorial from The (Eugene) Register-Guard:

Last year, Portland State University police shot and killed a man who was trying to break up a fight outside a bar. Now a state lawmaker wants to take guns away from some university police officers. His fellow lawmakers should pass. One tragedy doesn't justify making schools less safe.

Portland Democratic Rep. Diego Hernandez has introduced a bill to forbid university police in cities with more than 150,000 residents from carrying firearms. That's a

roundabout way of saying at the University of Oregon and PSU.

We have no doubt that Hernandez has good intentions. Faculty and students raised concerns about guns on campus, so he is serving those constituents. But, in the words of University of Oregon Police Association President Steven Barrett, his bill is "a drastic, ill-conceived, simplistic fix to a nuanced, complicated, and difficult issue."

Targeting just urban campuses is counterintuitive. If anything, campus police forces in big cities

have greater need to carry guns than their counterparts in smaller communities. Urban campuses are open to the public. Most people who stroll onto campus are benign, but in any city, troublemakers and violent individuals walk the streets, too. When they come onto campus, if an extreme situation arises, police need the right tools to respond.

Campus police also respond to incidents off campus, especially in neighborhoods with high concentrations of students. Eugene's West University, for example, has seen an

unacceptable number of assaults, thefts and other crimes in the past year.

It's important to note that university police in Oregon are full-blown police officers, not just security officers. They receive the same training as city cops, including in proper weapon handling and crisis response.

That's not to say there's no room for change and improvement. In addition to solid training, officers on a diverse campus like the University of Oregon must have sensitivity toward people of color, LGBTQ and

others. Police presence — especially armed police presence — impacts people differently.

The Daily Emerald reports that campus police are aware of these sensitivities, and are inviting students and campus community members to be active participants in helping them internalize them so that every officer responds appropriately. That work must continue here and at all Oregon universities. ...

... If Hernandez really wants to help, he should take a more nuanced approach focused on training and procedure.