

# Opinion

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## EDITORIAL

# Mueller report: Worth reading regardless of political spin

We have, it seems, reached the grim point in American partisan political history where a nearly two-year investigation that cost more than \$30 million and yielded a 448-page report muddies rather than clarifies the situation.

Of course only the most naive observer would have expected that Thursday's release of a redacted version of special counsel Robert Mueller's report on the Trump-Russia investigation would immediately quell debate on the topic.

Yet even before Americans had a chance to read Mueller's report, some elected representatives made statements implying that we ought not waste our time having a look for ourselves.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer told The Associated Press that "the process is poisoned before the report is even released."

New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker: "The American people deserve the truth. Not a spin from a Trump appointee."

Booker was referring to Attorney General William Barr, who spoke at a news conference Thursday morning prior to his release of the report. Booker's description of Barr's "spin" is not without foundation. The attorney general emphasized the absence of definitive evidence of criminal acts by President Trump, his boss.

But it's insulting to Americans to suggest that they're incapable of reading the actual report and reaching their own conclusions, regardless of what Barr said. Comments by Schumer, Booker and others "poisoned" the process, by calling into question the report's validity and thus its value, at least as much as Barr did.

Moreover, it's silly to argue, as Barr's critics seem to be doing, that his press conference comments would in any way deflect attention from parts of Mueller's report that reflect badly on Trump.

Indeed, within an hour of the report's release, newspaper websites, and multiple other sources, were quoting passages showing Trump's desire to fire Mueller, among other questionable actions by the president.

As Trump's detractors have said since Mueller finished his investigation last month, the president's claims of "total exoneration" are at best an oversimplification. But here's the thing — we could figure that out despite being "poisoned" by Barr's propaganda.

We just had to read the report. Which, after all, is why it was written.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

## GUEST EDITORIAL

# Report refutes Trump's claims of 'total exoneration'

Editorial from  
The Los Angeles Times:

President Trump has repeatedly crowed that special counsel Robert Mueller's report is a "total exoneration." After its release Thursday morning, he tweeted: "No collusion. No obstruction. For the haters and the radical left Democrats — Game Over."

But the report itself, for those who bothered to read it, makes a mockery of that assertion. Even with its multiple redactions, the voluminous document made public Thursday by the Justice Department contains numerous examples of Trump degrading his office by engaging in sleazy and self-serving behavior.

It's true that the special counsel didn't establish that Trump's campaign criminally cooperated with Russia in its efforts to interfere with the 2016 presidential campaign. (It does provide evidence that a Russian organization with ties to the Kremlin tirelessly promoted Trump and bashed Hillary Clinton on social media with the (evidently) unwitting aid of Trump campaign officials and Trump himself. It also notes several overtures by Russians to supply stolen emails and other "dirt" to the Trump campaign, drawing interest rather than alarm from campaign officials.)

But the report absolutely does not clear the president of the more serious accusation that he tried to obstruct justice through a variety of efforts to abort or interfere with the Russia investigation.

On the contrary, the report says: "If we had confidence after a thorough investigation of the facts that the president clearly did not commit obstruction of justice, we would so state. Based on the facts and the applicable legal standards, we are unable to reach that judgment." It goes on to say — despite Trump's boasts to the contrary — that the report "does not exonerate him."

A close look through the hundreds of pages of facts, evidence and legal interpretation reveals, as the report itself says, "multiple acts by the president that were capable of exerting undue influence over law enforcement investigations, including the Russian-interference and



obstruction investigations."

To name just a few: Trump attempted to have then-Atty. Gen. Jeff Sessions reverse his own decision — required by ethics rules — to recuse himself from the investigation. Trump fired FBI director James Comey — at least partly because of the "pressure" from the Russia investigation — and then lied about why he did so. He directed White House counsel Don McGahn to order Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein to fire Mueller soon after the special counsel's appointment. McGahn refused to carry out the order and prepared to resign, and Trump later backed down. When the New York Times reported on Trump's demand, the president asked McGahn to deny it.

The report makes it clear that most of Trump's attempts at interference failed, "but that is largely because the persons who surrounded the president declined to carry out orders or accede to his requests."

Despite that damning judgment, the special counsel decided not to take a position on whether Trump obstructed justice. Acting on their own, Attorney General William Barr and Rosenstein then concluded that the evidence "is not sufficient to establish that the president committed an obstruction-of-justice offense."

In other words, Trump skated by, despite ample evidence of misbehavior, thanks to a favorable and generous reading of the facts and laws by his own attorney general.

For the president to call that an "exoneration" is laughable.

Furthermore, even if you buy the attorney general's conclusion that no illegal obstruction took place, that doesn't make Trump's actions much less outrageous. Nor does such a finding prevent Congress from considering whether Trump's actions amount to "high crimes and misdemeanors" justifying impeachment and removal from office.

It seems unlikely, though, that impeachment will gain traction in the House, let alone that two-thirds of the Republican-controlled Senate would vote to remove Trump. And, in addition to being likely to fail, a battle over impeachment would be extraordinarily bitter and divisive for an already badly polarized country.

As we have said before, the best way to end the Trump presidency is for voters to turn out in large numbers to remove him in next year's election. The misconduct documented in Mueller's report strengthens the already urgent argument for replacing him. But even without it, there are dozens of good reasons to emphatically reject his leadership.

Americans didn't need the Mueller report to establish that this president is ignorant, erratic and irresponsible or that he is contemptuous of the rule of law.

But the special counsel's account underlines the importance of making Donald Trump a one-term president.

# Impressed, and exhausted, by Nevada's peaks

Nevada is lousy with hills, but these aren't the gently rolling hills that infest mediocre poetry and lard the boastful prose in travel guides.

There is nothing gentle about Nevada's hills.

Indeed there is nothing especially hilly about them, that adjective implying a certain modesty in scale wholly inappropriate for most of Nevada.

What Nevada has are mountains.

Immodest mountains that thrust skyward, 10,000, 12,000 feet and more, cleaving clouds and obstructing views.

These mountains jut.

They loom.

They intrude and interfere and impose themselves on the landscape, as blatant as skyscrapers.

This aspect of Nevada is no more a secret of the Silver State, of course, than its proliferation of slot machines or its permissive attitudes toward certain business transactions of a personal nature.

Mountains are notoriously difficult to hide, what with the ephemeral nature of clouds and nighttime.

Nevada has long been recognized for having an unusually rumpiled topography. Celebrated, too.

The proprietor of a gift shop in Ely told us, during our spring break



JAYSON JACOBY

tour of our neighbor to the south, that in fact Nevada is the most mountainous state.

I had no reason to dispute this claim. Besides which she was quite friendly — she allowed Max to select a lucky rabbit's foot and Olivia to choose an arrowhead, both gratis — and I felt it would have been quite rude to quibble.

But it turns out that her boast, which she offered with a palpable pride in her state's precipitous nature, was not an empty one.

Certain resources I have consulted — well, Wikipedia anyway — confirm that Nevada, with 172 summits that soar at least 2,000 feet above the surrounding land, is the most mountainous among the 48 continental states.

(Alaska, it hardly needs be said, stands alone in this regard, as it does in so many other geographic categories.)

Although comparing states by their abundance of mountains is not so meaningless as, say, ranking them by which are more "friendly" or "happy" or some other unavoidably subjective category, the prac-

tice does strike me as less precise than, say, estimating populations.

Mountains themselves can be measured, of course, and with immense accuracy thanks to orbiting satellites.

But I'm not sure there's any great value in listing Nevada as more mountainous than, say, the third- through fifth-place states — California, Montana and Washington.

I have visited each of those states and I wouldn't describe Nevada as distinctly more mountainous than any of the three.

For sheer magnificence in a single summit, in fact, I would rate Oregon's Mount Hood, as well Mount Shasta in California, and Mount Rainier in Washington, as eclipsing anything I saw in Nevada.

Nevada's mountains impressed me greatly, but it was a matter more of quantity than the attributes of any individual peak.

We drove for many hours at respectable speeds — you can't see much of Nevada otherwise — and always we could see at least one imposing range of mountains. Often we could see two or three.

Nevada isn't the only state, to be sure, with the characteristic topography of the Basin and Range — alternating valleys and steep-sloped mountain ranges that trend roughly north-south. This

geologic province extends into the southeastern corner of Oregon, with Steens Mountain the most notable example of this distinctive landscape.

But Nevada is the apotheosis of the Basin and Range.

It is, I'll concede, a trifle tedious, so monotonous is the terrain.

Nevada lacks the variety that defines its neighbors. There are none of the great volcanoes of Oregon, California and Washington — isolated peaks that dominate the views from dozens of miles in every direction.

Nevada has none of those states' sprawling forests, either. And of course it has no Pacific beachfront property (or any other beachfront, come to that).

Yet the sheer consistency of Nevada's mountain ranges, spanning almost the whole of its considerable length, began to overcome my jaded eyes during our six days there.

I got to thinking, somewhere along the lonely stretch of Highway 6 between Tonopah and Ely, about just how much elevation is confined within Nevada's borders.

(I know that when it comes to lonely highways, U.S. Route 50 in Nevada is officially "The Loneliest Road in America." But so far as I can tell pretty much any highway in the state can make a compelling case that it deserves the title. One

excellent candidate, state Highway 375, which includes the rather awe-inspiring sign reading "Next Gas 150 miles," already has a memorable moniker — it's the Extraterrestrial Highway. It's the highway nearest the infamous Area 51 military air base that features in all sorts of stories involving aliens and UFOs.)

When I see a mountain range, even one that I'm passing at 75 mph, I can't help but imagine how it would be to clamber up its slopes. I see a prominent ridge and I wonder whether it would afford an easier ascent than an adjacent draw, or whether a particular band of rock could be negotiated.

This sort of mental exercise, when undertaken in Nevada, is exhausting. I suppose in theory it's possible to count the ridges and draws in the state, or to estimate how much elevation you would gain if you summited each of those 172 peaks I mentioned earlier.

But not having a decade or two to spare poring over topographic maps, I'd not care to try.

I'm content to ponder, during an occasional daydream, the terrible immensity of Nevada's mountains, a gantlet of ups and downs sufficient to tax even the most battle-tested tendons.

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