

## EDITORIAL

## Firefighting costs, forest health go together

For years the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have had a problem: While federal budgets have included money for fighting wildfires, it often hasn't been enough to get the job done. The budget shortage could be made up by taking money earmarked for forest health restoration, a practice called fire borrowing, leaving the very work that would reduce the likelihood of catastrophic fire short of money.

That's about to change. Maybe. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 included a provision that would end fire borrowing in the federal 2020 fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1.

That was then. Today, just weeks before the fiscal year begins, the departments of the Interior and Agriculture, which oversee the two land management agencies, have failed to include the money Congress hoped would improve forest health even in the event of catastrophic fires.

The lack hasn't gone unnoticed. Oregon's two senators, Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both Portland Democrats, joined six other western Democratic senators in March to write to the secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture departments, urging them to include more money for forest health. They note that ending fire borrowing will allow the agencies to save \$649 million in fire suppression costs in the 2020 fiscal year, yet none of that money has gone to work on correcting the problems that lead to such fires in the first place.

The two, fire suppression and forest health, are inextricably linked, and funding one half of the pair — fire suppression — without funding the other leaves the country's public lands prone to more, bigger, and more expensive fires in the future. If the proposed federal spending is adopted, there are funds to restore only 3.4 million of the nation's 90 million acres of forest land in need of the work in the coming year.

That's not enough. The administration and Congress must do better.

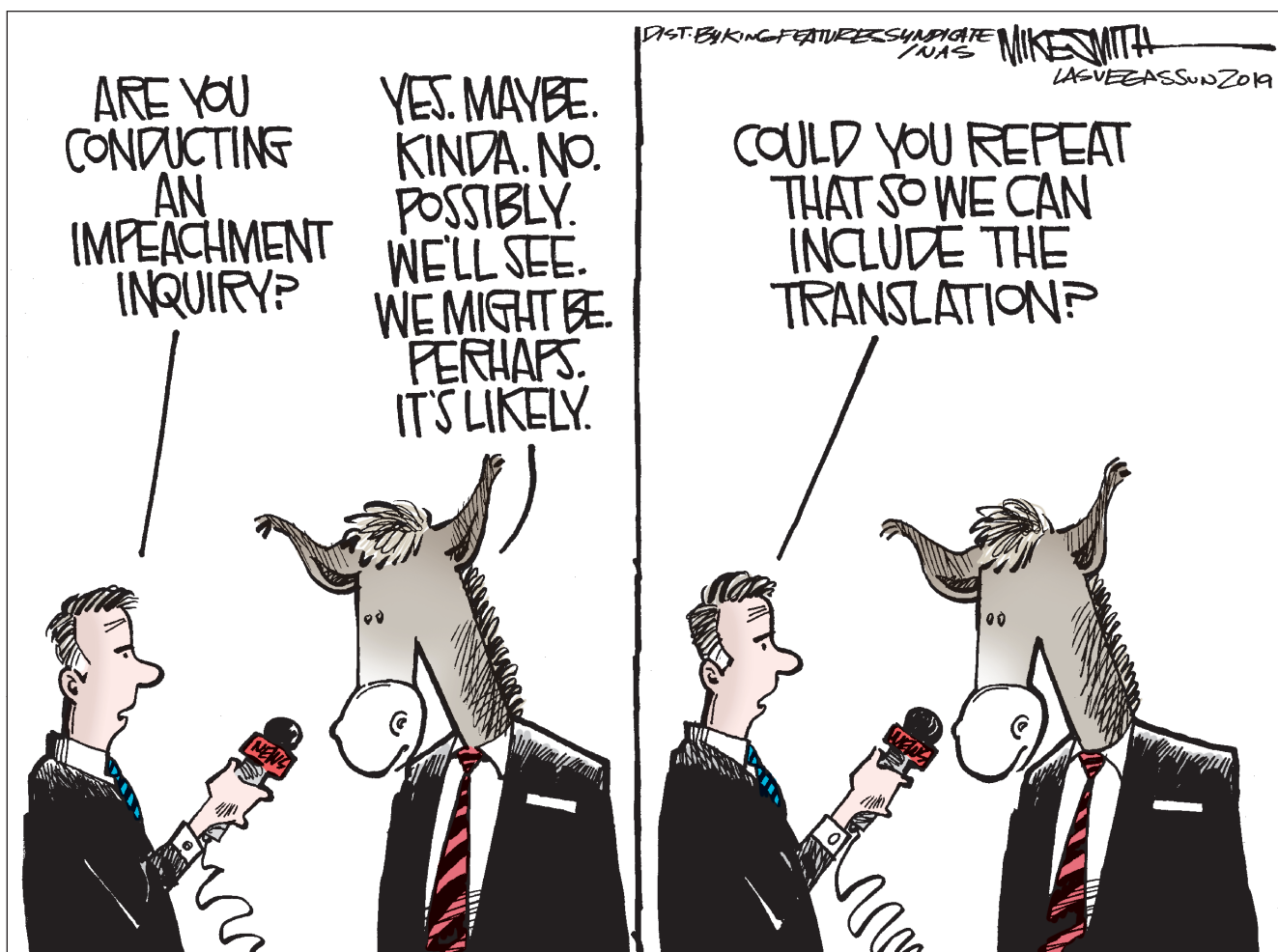
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## Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy of all statements in letters to the editor.
- Letters are limited to 350 words; longer letters will be edited for length. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.
- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.
- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

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## OTHER VIEWS

## Governor Brown fails in transparency

## Editorial from The Oregonian:

Even for those familiar with the lack of transparency from Oregon Gov. Kate Brown's administration, the circumstances leading up to the sudden resignation by Oregon Public Records Advocate Ginger McCall are dumbfounding.

McCall, a well-regarded attorney with extensive experience in public records and privacy issues, was named to the new position in January 2018. From the start, she poured her passion for transparency and access to public records into practice, holding trainings for government officials, mediating disputes and working with legislators and a public records advisory council for new ways to promote access.

But on Sept. 9, McCall announced her resignation, citing "abuse of authority" by Brown's general counsel, Misha Isaak, as The Oregonian/OregonLive's Hillary Borrud reported. Among other things, McCall alleged Isaak intimidated and pressured her to secretly advance Brown's agenda, even if it conflicted with the mission or objectives of McCall's office. During a Jan. 15 meeting, McCall said Isaak claimed supervisory authority over her, dismissing the independence of her office. He told her she should derail proposals that could put the governor in a politically awkward situation, according to a memo McCall wrote after the meeting.

Isaak then closed the meeting with an ominous statement, telling her he was concerned she would call a reporter and say that the governor's office was censoring her, McCall's memo states. The "expectation of secrecy," she wrote, "felt both unethical and dishonest."

She's right — but it extends beyond the secrecy request. It is both unethical and dishonest for the governor's office to

try to gain back-channel control of an independent office meant to promote open government and build the public's trust. It is both unethical and dishonest for the governor's office, while responding to the news of her resignation, to accuse McCall of lying. And it was both unethical and dishonest for Brown to attempt to distance herself from responsibility for the actions of her top advisers when she's the one running the show.

McCall's resignation was a principled stand, but it shouldn't mark the end of this matter. There's much that Brown should do, starting with Isaak. The governor recently nominated him for a seat on the Oregon Court of Appeals. She should rescind the nomination or encourage him to voluntarily withdraw his name. Even before the news of McCall's resignation, the decision to give her inexperienced, but loyal lawyer a seat on the appellate court smacked of cronyism. But McCall's very credible allegations that he pressured her to support the governor's political objectives over the mission of her independent office merit pulling the nomination completely. If true, such scorn for transparency and disrespect for the office's independence show Isaak to be unqualified for the appeals court.

And nothing is stopping Isaak — a 37-year-old attorney with no bench experience — from seeking a seat on the appeals court through the elections process if he so desires. Voters are free to choose him if they think he's trustworthy. But there's no reason he should be gifted a vacant seat. Brown only hurts her own reputation by following through with this nomination, which was problematic from the start.

Brown has already said she wants to hear McCall's ideas for making the office truly independent. She should also meet with members of the Public Records Ad-

visory Committee to hear their concerns following this debacle and ensure that fixes are in front of the Legislature for the short session next year.

Brown also should answer for the actions of those in her office. It's not just Isaak's pressure or his demeaning and insulting advice to McCall that she slow down and not be so ambitious. It's not just that Brown's government accountability attorney, Emily Matasar, apparently followed Isaak's lead in pressuring McCall. It's also the immediate response by her spokesman, Chris Pair, to try to discredit McCall after the news of her resignation broke. In an email to Oregon Public Broadcasting, Pair said her allegations were "untrue," which was largely refuted by Brown herself in a statement at the end of the day. That attack-dog instinct to label McCall a liar reveals much about how the governor's office handles unflattering news.

Brown also seems to cast blame on McCall for not bringing her concerns directly to her previously. But McCall isn't the one who mishandled the situation. Isaak wasn't some low-level employee in the governor's office. He was the governor's lawyer. The more appropriate question is did Brown and her chief of staff know what Isaak was doing, and if they didn't, why not?

In a press release Sept. 9, Brown ended her statement on the resignation by saying, "It appears this is a situation where staff were conflicted between the goals of serving the Governor and promoting the cause of transparency. Let me be clear, there should be no conflict."

How odd that Brown didn't finish that thought by saying declaratively that transparency comes first. She should have. Instead, she's left things a little ambiguous. Brown's next moves should reveal exactly what she means.

## Commerce Secretary should just resign

## Editorial from The New York Daily News:

Why is Wilbur Ross still on the public payroll?

The commerce secretary's latest offense is the serious allegation that he ordered professionals at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, upon threat of losing their jobs, to contradict their expert assessments in order to echo rather than contradict President Trump's errant claims that Hurricane Dorian might hit Alabama.

In short, fall in line, meteorologists — or Hurricane Donald will blow you away.

This is not Ross' first corruption and obstruction rodeo. A year ago, he told Congress that a citizenship question was being considered on Census forms on orders from the Justice Department, to comply with the Voting Rights Act. Commerce staffers, in fact, confirmed that Ross himself had pressed the issue at the White House's behest.

In confirmation hearings, the sup-

posed billionaire had promised to divest his investments upon entering the powerful Cabinet position. More than a year later, he had still maintained several stock holdings — and entered into others — to the tune of a cool \$1.2 million.

If Ross had decency, he'd resign. If Trump had some, he'd fire him in more unceremonious fashion than he just booted John Bolton.

Neither is happening. House Democrats, over to you.

## CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

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**Oregon Legislature:** Legislative documents and information are available online at [www.leg.state.or.us](http://www.leg.state.or.us).

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**Baker County Commission:** Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.

**Baker County departments:** 541-523-8200. Travis Ash, sheriff; Jeff Smith, roadmaster; Matt Shirliff, district attorney; Alice Durlinger, county treasurer; Stefanie Kirby, county clerk; Kerry Savage, county assessor.

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