

EDITORIAL

Let voters
decide on
death
penalty

Like Kate Brown, who replaced him as Oregon governor, John Kitzhaber wanted to do away with the death penalty in the state.

But at least Kitzhaber respected his constituents enough to recognize that this matter ought to be left to voters rather than the legislative or executive branches.

When Kitzhaber declared a moratorium on executions in Oregon in 2011, he supported the idea of putting the issue on the ballot. This was eminently reasonable — the last time voters decided on the death penalty, in 1984, 55% who cast a ballot supported execution as a possible punishment.

Moreover, that vote amended the Oregon Constitution, which means the voters, having decided capital punishment should be an option, also reserved for themselves the option of changing their mind.

Not that the sanctity of the Constitution has proved much of a deterrent for Brown and the Democrats who control the Legislature. They not only haven't shown much interest in consulting voters about the death penalty, but this year they passed a law that severely narrows the definition of aggravated murder — the only crime punishable by execution in Oregon.

And although their intent was that the new law would apply only to future cases, Oregon Justice Department concluded the law could potentially also affect defendants who have already been convicted.

The bottom line here is that Brown and her backers in the Capitol, being legally precluded from reversing voters' 1984 decision, have been striving to thwart the electorate's will anyway.

Oregon has changed quite a lot in the past 35 years, with the electorate trending toward the left side of the political spectrum. It may well be that a majority would choose to remove capital punishment from the Constitution. Brown and the Democrats should advocate for giving voters that chance.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

'Get-Trump agenda' muddies
line between news, opinion

JAY AMBROSE

Imagine you see someone standing on the sidewalk as a car passes by, going through a mud puddle that splashes all over him. The next day you read about the event in a newspaper. The headline says, "Auto Driver Tries to Drown Pedestrian," and you realize you are reading The New York Times, the same paper that tried to make it sound evil that President Donald Trump had a telephone call with the prime minister of Australia.

The call was not all that extraordinary, just the kind of thing presidents sometimes have to do. The Justice Department, you see, is investigating whether the Mueller probe into Trump allegedly colluding with the Russians was baselessly instigated by government officials. We already have had some scary developments along those lines, and, if it should be true, this could be even worse than Russian interference with our elections. If our own government and partisan politicians get away with turning laws and principles upside down so that bureaucrats instead of voters decide with help from members of Congress who presidents are, the America republic is gone, kaput, finished.

They are at it again, with the usual assistance of certain news outlets that are more nearly views outlets. Part of the Justice Department probe concerns Australians playing a role in the shenanigans, and so, before department agents started checking out these

people, Trump was asked to call to assure the prime minister's concurrence. As a signal of the threats to our system of governance, sources of some devious kind related the call's content to the Times, which had this to say, high up in a front-page story:

"The president is using federal law enforcement powers to aid his political prospects, settle scores with his perceived 'deep state' enemies and show that the Mueller investigation had corrupt, partisan origins."

This opinion, which does not belong in a straight news story, runs counter to the fact that Trump's phone call was run-of-the-mill stuff in this sort of situation. What's more, the idea of "corrupt, partisan origins" of a two-year, multi-million-dollar effort finding nothing is hardly a Trump invention. It is the consequence of revelations the Times surely has noticed. This current investigation appears far more justified than the Mueller embarrassment, and attacks on Attorney General William Barr by his role are also absurd. He's supposed to sit back and twirl his thumbs when our democracy is at stake?

Of course, the media focus has lately been on Trump's impeachment-inducing Ukrainian phone call, which could be serious if Trump is proven to have had ulterior motives in temporarily withhold-

ing aid to Ukraine. But even this case is mostly flimsy and the accusers have plenty to answer for. The whistleblower, for instance, is not a whistleblower in the usual sense. This person seems to have based his or her charges on what others said, not direct knowledge, and now he or she wants to remain unidentified. The reason cited is fear of physical attack when the real fear may be that the whole truth comes out. But if necessary, surround the person with troops.

This business of revealing what is said in presidential phone calls is itself frightening, to say the least. How can presidents and foreign leaders have candid, strategic exchanges if the whole world has a chance to learn what was said. Those telling us it's wrong to try harder to protect the information would probably advise unlocked doors after burglaries.

What I am writing is a self-confessed opinion article, not a straight news story, and so I think it is OK for me to end with a sentence about the Times like the sentence I quoted by the Times: The newspaper is using freedom of the press to aid its get-Trump agenda, flatten those whose common sense gets in the way and show that this president is guilty of everything and anything no matter what the facts are.

Jay Ambrose is an op-ed columnist for Tribune News Service. Readers may email him at speaktoday@aol.com.

Your views

City Council should not rehire Fred Warner as city manager

Calling all Baker City citizens: Tuesday, Oct. 8 the City Council is planning on rehiring Fred Warner — after he retires from his city manager position — to be the new city manager. Does this make any sense? They plan on paying him \$101,953/year (his current salary). The city will also pay his health, dental and vision insurance for \$12,000/year, plus a life insurance policy.

The Councilors say by 'rehiring' him they will

save the city \$6,000, from the PERS payments.

How will this \$6,000 help a city in dire straits financially? According to the City finance director, the general fund, which pays some employees' salaries, collects less per year than the expenditures. This financial year the city is in the hole \$93,790, next year \$373,323 and 2021-2022 the amount will be \$649,694. The city can NOT continue on this cycle unless they want to go bankrupt.

At the last City Council meeting there were only 4 citizens to listen to the Councilors. My

husband and I were two. I suggested that once an employee retires it should be permanent, no rehiring for the same position. I stated the City should put out a proposal to hire someone else, bringing new knowledge to town. The city has been paying Mr. Warner approximately \$4,000/month in benefits over his wages of \$,8330/month. If the city was to "rehire" him, he should only be paid \$4,330/month or \$51,960/year. The city should not pay his insurance and won't pay PERS.

Mr. Warner stated, "You probably could get

someone for the position for \$50,000 but they wouldn't know anything." Well, Mr. Warner what did you know before you started? Mr. Warner will also be receiving Social Security/Medicare, and PERS pay.

Should he be paid another \$100K?

Come to the meeting on Tuesday, Oct 8. Let the councilors hear your opinion on rehiring Mr. Warner. If you can't make it to the meeting, contact the councilors either by phone or e-mail. Remember — They work for us, the citizens of Baker City! How do they know what you are thinking if you don't tell them!

Penny Rienks
Baker City

OTHER VIEWS

Editorial from Albany Democrat-Herald:

We've turned the calendar into October, which means it's time to fully confront the rites of autumn: raking leaves, loading up on pumpkin spice (to include, apparently, in everything edible for the next two months) and making your appointment for an influenza vaccination.

Experts said last week that, while it's too early to know for sure what the prospects are for this year's flu season, the best way to boost your odds is to get a flu shot, and it's not too early to do that. The good news is that this year's flu season doesn't appear to be off to an early start, said Dr. Daniel Jernigan, flu chief at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Nevertheless, a review of the last two flu seasons may well increase your desire to get vaccinated: We've been through a pair of rough ones. Last year, as you might recall, a new strain of the influenza virus started

up at about the same time as the first wave of illnesses was winding down. The result was one of the longest influenza seasons on record. The year before wasn't exactly a picnic, either: That season marked the highest death toll from the flu in decades, according to an Associated Press story.

Part of the problem the last couple of seasons was that the flu vaccine those years turned out not to be a particularly good match for the viruses in circulation. To some extent, this is because concocting each year's vaccine is a bit of educated guess: Scientists need to be able to predict, some six months in advance, which particular strains of the virus will be in circulation. Some year's guesses are better than others.

But another issue is at work as well: Most of today's vaccine is produced by growing flu virus in chicken eggs, a 70-year-old technology. One big downside of the technology is that it takes too long to whip up a different

vaccine to battle a surprise strain. Last week, in a bit of news that might have been overshadowed by other news out of Washington, the Trump administration urged a renewed effort to modernize production. Assuming that the administration follows through, there's no doubt that researchers would welcome a bump in federal funding.

It might even help with work that's taking place here in Oregon. A fascinating recent story in The Oregonian outlined efforts by Jonah Sacha, a vaccine expert at Oregon Health & Science University, to create a universal flu vaccine — a one-time shot that would successfully guard against all versions of the flu. It's a remarkably difficult goal, since the influenza virus is notorious for its ability to constantly change, but Sacha's work is showing enough promise that his lab recently collected a \$1.7 million grant.

But even if everything goes perfectly, Sacha's vaccine won't be ready for at least

another five years.

In the meantime, your best defense this influenza season is to get vaccinated. Even if this year's vaccine turns out to be not a particularly good match for this year's flu strain, the vaccination can be helpful: Dr. William Schaffner of Vanderbilt University and the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases said that people who get vaccinated and still get sick can expect a milder illness, and a lower risk of pneumonia, hospitalization or death. (The latter isn't an idle concern: The flu kills about 24,000 Americans on average every year, the CDC says.)

As for the rest of the season's precautions against the flu, you know the drill: Cover your coughs and sneezes. Wash your hands frequently during flu season. (A recent study showed washing is more effective than hand sanitizers.) And, if you do get sick, stay home: It's not true that misery loves company, and it's especially true during flu season.