

Opinion

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OUR VIEW

State's spending problems

When people spend other people's money, they can be less than finicky. And so it seems with workers at the state of Oregon.

For instance, the state bought 23 Xerox printers for \$1,461.78. A state audit found a better deal that could have saved the state more than half that amount.

The state bought 58 copies of some statistical software for \$12,694.42. A state audit found a better deal that could have saved \$6,079.52.

And the state bought four licenses for some database software for \$119,649.11. The same state audit from December 2018 found a better deal that could have saved the state \$107,017.51.

Yikes.

Those are egregious examples. We did pick them from the audit to highlight the shocking savings that the state could have made if it spent money more carefully. Of course, state workers may not always have the time to seek out a great deal on every purchase and state purchasing requirements can interfere with getting the cheapest price. The state audit found, though, the state could have saved between \$400 million and \$1.6 billion during the 2015-2017 biennium based on \$8 billion in procurements during that time.

We'd like to be able to tell you that's all fixed now. We can't. But we can tell you the state is moving in what could be a positive direction in one area — purchases by state and local governments that are too big to put on a credit card.

The state has a contract with Periscope Holdings, an Austin, Texas, company, to build a new statewide procurement system, according to *Governing* magazine. The platform called OregonBuys is scheduled to gradually go live across government in 2020. There are similar systems in Illinois, New Jersey and Massachusetts. If it works right, it will replace what's called ORPIN, which is the system the state and local governments use now.

Buying stuff for the state gets complicated, because there are many legal requirements. The hope is that the system will keep that in the background and government workers will be able to shop for goods more easily. It will automate a lot of the work. It might make it easier for smaller vendors to compete for state dollars. And the state should be able to better track spending and purchases and manage that data.

Will the cost of the OregonBuys be recouped in savings? We hope so. Will it fix the fundamental problem that people aren't as careful when they spend other people's money? No. But it should enable the state and the public to better monitor it.

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Democrat list of witnesses against President Trump...

Schiff's bias aids GOP skeptics

JON HEALEY

Even before his ill-advised mockery of President Trump's request for "a favor" from new Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky, House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam B. Schiff (D-Calif.) was seen by Republicans as blinded by bias against Trump. And now that Schiff is leading the initial phase of the House impeachment inquiry, he has become Exhibit A in the GOP argument that the whole thing is rigged.

As if to confirm those suspicions, Schiff's committee has turned a portion of its website into a glossy, political-campaign-style presentation of the case against Trump, titled: "Read for yourself: President Trump's Abuse of Power." It's accessible from the main page of the Intelligence Committee's website through a prominent link bearing the innocuous-sounding title, "Impeachment Inquiry."

"The House of Representatives launched an impeachment inquiry to ascertain the full extent of the president's misconduct, and thanks to testimony from dedicated, nonpartisan public servants, we now have a much fuller picture of how President Trump abused the State Department and other levers of government for his own political gain," the page states in its introduction. "Pursuant to House Resolution 660, we are now releasing transcripts of these witness interviews so every American can see the facts and decide for themselves: is this conduct acceptable?"

The question featured in boldface on the website may sound neutral, but the page is anything but. Instead, it highlights excerpts from selected witnesses to paint a damning case against Trump.

This is precisely why Republicans focus at least as much on the process of the inquiry as the substance. But it's important to put what Schiff is doing in historical context, not because he's breaking with precedent but because he's adapting past practice to the current legal reality.

President Nixon's "Saturday Night

Massacre" — his attempt to shut down the Watergate investigation in October 1973 by having the Justice Department fire special prosecutor Archibald Cox, which prompted the top two DOJ officials to resign rather than carry out Nixon's order — helped persuade Congress to enact a law in 1978 creating a judicially appointed independent counsel to investigate allegations of presidential wrongdoing. Independent counsel Lawrence Walsh subsequently probed the Iran-Contra scandal during the Reagan administration, and then independent counsel Kenneth W. Starr dug into the Whitewater land-fraud allegations against President Clinton.

Starr's Whitewater investigation covered several years and produced nothing, but with the help of attorneys for Paula Jones, who'd sued Clinton for sexual harassment, Starr forced Clinton in August 1998 to testify before a grand jury about an alleged White House affair with an intern named Monica Lewinsky. Clinton falsely denied having "sexual relations" with her, and within a few months, the House impeached him in a lame-duck session. The Senate declined to convict him the following year.

Congressional Republicans hated the Walsh investigation. Congressional Democrats hated the Starr investigation. As a result, Congress let the independent counsel statute lapse in 1999. Since then, the primary responsibility for investigating the president has rested with the Justice Department. Most recently, a top DOJ official appointed special counsel Robert S. Mueller III to look into possible Russian collusion with the 2016 Trump campaign after Trump fired FBI Director James B. Comey, who had been leading the counterintelligence probe.

The current attorney general, Bill Barr, has shown no inclination to investigate the allegations that Trump leaned on Ukrainian officials to conduct

investigations that would benefit Trump politically; in fact, the DOJ has already decreed that Trump's request in the July 25 phone call with Zelenskiy did not violate federal campaign-finance laws against seeking donations from foreign sources.

So in the absence of an independent counsel or a special counsel, Schiff has put himself in the role of the person assembling the case against Trump. That's why the depositions were conducted in private sessions, as grand jury testimony is done, making it hard for witnesses to coordinate their stories (hello, Gordon Sondland!). That's also why Trump isn't being given the chance to participate yet, although Republicans on the committees are certainly advancing the narratives Trump's lawyers would be advancing to defend the president.

The public hearings that begin this week will give Republicans more of the openness they sought, but Schiff is likely to remain in Kenneth W. Starr mode. He's leading a three-committee effort to gather evidence about Trump's machinations on Ukraine; it will be up to the House Judiciary Committee to open the process to Trump's lawyers, who will challenge the evidence and try to put it into a very different context. The Judiciary Committee will then decide whether to recommend articles of impeachment for the House to vote on.

Notably, Starr laid out 11 specific grounds for impeaching Clinton based on his conduct with Lewinsky and his efforts afterward to cover it up. If Starr's investigation of that episode is any guide, one can expect the report Schiff produces to be similarly pointed and conclusory. It's safe to bet too that Republicans with situational amnesia about Kenneth W. Starr will complain that the process was irredeemably tainted from the start.

Jon Healey is the Los Angeles Times' deputy editorial page editor.

OTHER VIEWS

Harris' longer school day proposal worth considering

Editorial from The Dallas Morning News:

We wouldn't have expected ourselves to back a new spending plan from a presidential primary candidate, and certainly not in the present atmosphere where trillions of dollars in new taxes are being proposed to support programs of such vast government overreach that it staggers the mind.

But we had to pause when California Sen. Kamala Harris, a slumping candidate in the Democratic primary, suggested a modest pilot program to study expanding the school day from its traditional ending time of 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

This actually could be helpful.

And it's worth considering.

Harris' proposal would see a small number of participating school districts receive \$5 million in grants over five years to help some low-income elementary schools develop after-school programs that would keep kids learning and active until a parent or guardian gets off work.

The program would be studied for its impact on parents, children and schools and depending on its outcome, could be considered for greater funding in the future.

Don't get us wrong. We don't think schools should raise children. Parents should. And in a more perfect society, perhaps, children could have greater free time

to roam and explore their world.

We are kidding ourselves to believe we live in such a society. Many kids are simply transferred from school to some off-site after-school care when the bell rings. Others ride the bus to an empty home and wait for mom or dad's workday to end.

For too many working parents, the hours between the end of school and the end of work (not to mention the commute home) are fraught with concern about getting quality care if they can even begin to afford that in the first place.

Harris' policy recognizes that reality and its particular impact on low-income communities where children are most vulnerable. And

it approaches a proposed solution in a sound fashion — a slow and integral study in interested communities.

Our surprise at our interest in this plan is surpassed only by our surprise at the reaction of progressive media and, of course, far-left social media.

They hate Harris' plan because it would actually help working parents work, as if a 40-hour workweek qualifies as the depth of capitalist cruelty.

Rather than reshaping society to accommodate the needs of workers, Harris' plan appears designed to keep more people working for longer, suiting the interests of their employers and

using gestures towards community input as a smokescreen," writes Brendan O'Connor in *Vice*.

O'Connor carries on to conclude — and this isn't parody — that slowing economic productivity would be great because it "could reduce climate-harming emissions."

Tell that to people who need a paycheck to cover the rent and groceries.

Harris' plan actually is accommodating "workers," or people as we like to call them. And what's more, it might give their children the advantage of greater learning and extracurricular activities that are too often not available in lower-income schools.