

Hayes on the sidelines, but damage is done

At his press conference last Friday, Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber said his fiancée Cylvia Hayes will have no policy role during the remainder of his fourth term. Setting the stage for that declaration were the news reports generated by Hillary Borrud in the Salem bureau of the EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

While it was useful to have the governor clarify where Hayes stands in the Kitzhaber administration going into the next four years, the question remains: Exactly what policies did she influence during his third term – and who was she working for? The governor, in an appearance that broke little new ground, mostly referred such questions to Hayes – who was traveling abroad.

As *The Register-Guard* of Eugene has mused, there's a question of how many shoes are "still waiting to drop."

Especially when it comes to environmental policies, which were Hayes' "passion," it's hard to look at any decision or position and not wonder who was making the wheels turn, and which wheels were getting greased. Coal exports, gillnet fishing, low-carbon fuel standards – the specter of ethics violations casts a pall over them now.

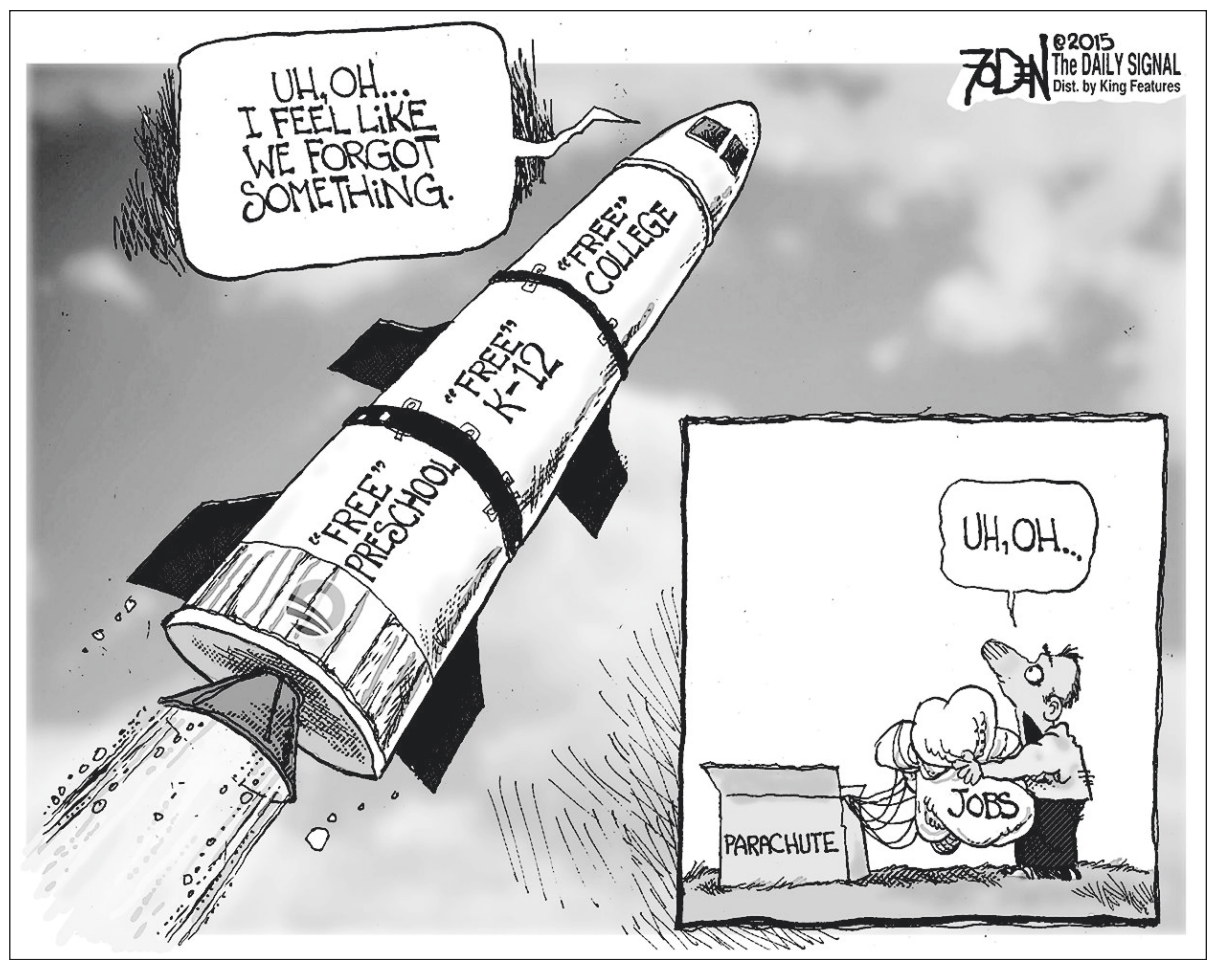
People are quick to judge actions by their outcome, and perhaps that's why the outrage over the First Lady's shady employment history has been relatively muted. Those who are pleased with

the enviro-friendly direction this administration has taken us have been able to shrug off Hayes' activities – at least until the disclosure of the \$118,000 in apparently untaxed income Hayes took from the Clean Economy Development Center in 2011 and 2012. Commenters on stories about that situation suggest this is the last straw even for some supporters of the Democratic administration.

To be sure, even if the governor had never met Hayes he might have made the exact same decisions. But the failure of the administration to take these issues seriously from the get-go remains a big problem for him. This points to self-interest, rather than an interest in serving Oregon.

The essence of Kitzhaber's Cylvia Hayes problem was described succinctly by Brent Walth, Gov. Tom McCall's biographer and managing editor of *Willamette Week*, during a talk last November to Columbia Forum in Astoria. Said Walth: "I didn't think we'd ever see, in my life, the office put up for sale, but that's exactly what we've seen."

The tragedy of John Kitzhaber stems from a mistake as old as Shakespeare. Kitzhaber has stayed too long. All politicians and celebrities nurture their myths. The reason that John Kitzhaber is having such a hard time reckoning with the damage that Cylvia Hayes has done him is that the John Kitzhaber of myth – that is, the Kitzhaber of his first and second terms – was never this foolish.



FROM THE BOOKSHELF

Memoir tells of heavenly homestead on the Steens

By Linda Driskill
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

"If there is a heaven, I hope it looks like the Steens," says author Eileen O'Keeffe McVicker in her volume of photos and memoirs, "Child of the Steens."

Steens Mountain, along with the interesting Frenchglen Hotel (no keys, no TV, family style meals, etc.), was a destination point for me during three decades on a fire lookout at the south end of the Prairie City Ranger District.

Of course, that experience may not be for everyone; I remember a fellow tourist once asked me at one of the spectacular viewpoints if this was "all there is to see ... scenery?" I said yes and he hopped on his "hawg" and roared off.

The O'Keeffe family arrived on the Steens Mountain from Ireland in 1930, a time of serious drought when most people trying to work small homesteads were giving up. The massive spread belonging to one of the cattle barons still hanging on was purchased by the federal government, and the public is fortunate to now own the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, stop-

Book Review

"Child of the Steens"
By Eileen O'Keeffe McVicker,
2008

ping-off spot to literally hundreds of thousands of birds on their traditional migration routes.

"Child of the Steens" is a little girl's story of being totally in love with the outdoors, the mountain and everything around her. Her family, making their livelihood raising sheep, lived there contentedly until the time came to move to Burns for schooling of the three children.

This Steens Mountain child claims she was "never bored once in her life." She loved it all – and that included the dangerous time when her mother shot a rabid coyote stalking her dad near their homestead. Another time, her father was extremely ill during one isolated winter. They not only survived it all but incorporated their mother's dictum that the word "can't" doesn't belong in any vocabulary.

McVicker regards her formative years as a continued educational experience: birds, wildlife,

geology, Native American culture, personal responsibility with the sheep, etc.

Life was always interesting and occasionally amusing – like the time the kids playing outside a family dance hall one evening decided to bury a passed-out Basque shepherd. Just in case he wasn't dead, they planned to put a stovepipe over his face.

Then there was their ultra-dependable "Old Johnny Mule," who had a peculiar quirk: at exactly 5 each evening he stopped work and wouldn't move until they removed his harness.

McVicker tells a fun story of a happy childhood in a place of exceptional interest and beauty; worth reading by those who visit Steens Mountain often or those who might put it on their list of places to experience.

Other resources are a coffee table book, "Steens Mountain in Oregon's High Desert Country," with commentary and photos, as well as "Great Basin Country" by local authors Nancy and the late Denzel Ferguson, available in the Grant County Library's Oregon room.

Linda Driskill is a Grant County writer and volunteer at the Grant County Library.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Don't sign MOU

To the Editor:

For anyone that reads this I would like to let you know, the elected body that you call county commissioners is preparing to sign over their jobs of protecting the health, safety, and welfare of your county to the U.S. Forest Service and with it the vote you cast for them.

On Jan. 26, the Forest Service held a meeting in Pendleton to attempt to get county commissioners from Baker, Grant, Harney, Morrow, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa and Wheeler counties in Oregon along with Asotin, Columbia, Garfield and Walla Walla counties in Washington.

The document they asked them to sign was a memorandum of understanding that the counties would function as "cooperating agencies" under the guidance of the Forest Service, giving the Forest Service status as the lead agency and firmly putting your elected officials in the back seat of the decision-making process.

No county commissioners signed the document on Jan. 26, but Mr. Grasty of Harney County and Mr. Davidson and McClure of Union County have stated they more than likely will sign the document. I do not believe any of us voted to place these people into the jobs they currently hold to have them sign over their decision-making authority to the Forest Service.

The counties have a way of fully protecting our positions by entering into a coordination agreement with the Forest Service that requires the Forest Service to align their land management use plan with each in-

dividual county, and not lump counties together and allow the Forest Service to make their decisions for them.

Within our county courts over the next few weeks a vote will be held to decide if your county commissioners should accept cooperating agency status or not. The answer is simple, no, they should not.

You need to tell them that, point blank.

John D. George
Bates

Lost opportunity

To the Editor:

Thank you for your editorial on our County Court's decision not to sign a letter of support on the proposed bike paths. The state of Oregon has recognized Grant County as an innovator and leader in the development of biking tourism to boost our economy. The Court's decision on this has given Grant County a black eye. That decision is a travesty for all of us.

Every community in Grant County has benefited by the draw of biking. Enthusiasts bring their bikes from all over Oregon to enjoy the unique biking opportunities we have here. They buy groceries here, eat in restaurants, sleep in motels, buy clothing they forgot to bring with them, have their bikes repaired here.

The Court's decision on declining to write a letter of support does not stop bikers from coming. But that decision does have an impact on tourism decisions at the state level. We may have lost a rare opportunity for being promoted statewide

as a premier area for welcoming an industry that is clean and brings a financial boost to the county.

And, oh yes, their numbers can't begin to match those of wild and domestic animals that need to indiscriminately relieve themselves sometime during the day. There is nothing like stepping out your front door into a pile of bear shit. And that is big stuff.

Eva Harris
Canyon City

Name the scoundrels

To the Editor:

I was troubled by Mr. Sprauve's commentary. He is alleging that Grant County has rampant corruption in its government. He did not name the individuals who have conflicts of interest and/or are corrupt.

He should go to the district attorney and sheriff and report the evidence of this corruption. If he feels they are also corrupt he needs to go to the Oregon State Police and Oregon attorney general!

Mr. Sprauve wants to be held accountable so I ask him to step forward and name the scoundrels so we can take appropriate action and clean up the Grant County government. We can prosecute the ones who are guilty of crimes and recall the ones he has identified as having serious conflict of interests if they don't resign. I appreciate Mr. Sprauve bringing this notice of corruption to the attention of Grant County residents.

Many of us were unaware of corruption at the county government level.

Harry Stangel
Dayville



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