

Brown deal leaves bad aftertaste

It is not a political scandal by any means, but the recent news Gov. Kate Brown spent a large chunk of public money to pay one of her former advisers to serve as a political consultant leaves a bitter aftertaste.

The news last week barely broke above the collective consciousness of the state and it certainly gained little traction in portions of the Willamette Valley, a traditional base for the governor.

At its heart the news revolves around a deal brokered in 2020 where the governor hired her former communications director Chris Pair through a no-bid state contract. The deal provides Pair with a salary of \$6,500 a month to attend weekly meetings of the Western Governors' Association regarding enlarging the effort to create infrastructure for electric vehicles. So far, the state has paid Pair \$91,000.

Brown also has paid Pair money through one of her political action committees.

When Pair — a long-time member of Brown's staff — departed in January 2020, Brown made no mention he might be hired back. A month later, the governor's office asked

state officials to prepare the no-bid contract for Pair's consulting company.

Now, on the face of it, none of this is illegal. In fact, former government officials turning around to work as independent contractors for their former bosses or agencies is commonplace. It just looks bad.

Transparency in government is essential for a democracy to function properly. That means the public has the right to know what its elected leaders are doing and why.

The money paid to Pair so far is, obviously, just a drop in the bucket of the multibillion-dollar budget of the state. But it is the principle that counts in this situation. If the governor was going to hire one of her former staffers and let him or her be paid with public dollars, she should have disclosed it. State government — and especially the governor's office — isn't a private company. It's funded by the public, and the public has a right to know — no matter how low the sum — how the government is using its money.

The governor didn't break the law, but bankrolling one of her former staffers on the public's dime doesn't sit well with us.

REPUBLICANS & DEMOCRATS ARGUE ABOUT INFRASTRUCTURE...



GUEST COMMENT

Oregonians can help stop new gun lockup bill

Every year, in homes across America, countless law-abiding citizens use firearms to protect themselves and their families from dangerous intruders.

But in Oregon, how much longer will they be able to do so?

Last spring, the state legislature — with the support of only Democrats and no Republicans — passed Senate Bill 554; Gov. Kate Brown signed the bill in June. Its main provision: "An owner or possessor of a firearm shall, at all times that the firearm is not carried by or under the control of the owner, possessor or authorized person, secure the firearm with an engaged trigger or cable lock; in a locked container; or in a gun room" — in other words, in a way that renders it inoperable or inaccessible for immediate use. Unless postponed by rank-and-file Oregonians (more on which below), SB 554 is scheduled to become law in late September.

Now, consider two recent Oregon incidents (among many other of their kind here in the past several years).

On March 11, 2019, in Josephine County, one Michael Lee Fouch "forced his way into his ex-girlfriend's house and threatened her," reported KDRV-TV News; "he forced his way into a bedroom where the woman was hiding with her young son, causing her to fear for her safety." The woman shot Fouch in the groin, reported the station, "causing him to flee."

On March 25 of this year, in Lane County, one Brandon Coats came to the home of a married couple and their child and, KMTR-TV News reported, began "trying to force his way inside." The husband, said the station, "armed himself with a handgun in order to protect his family and a few moments later, Coats forcibly broke open their front door armed with a shotgun." At that point, the husband shot Coats and held him at gunpoint until law enforcement officers arrived.

In these instances, what would have transpired had the residents' firearms been incapacitated by a trigger lock or secured inside a safe? Beset, suddenly, by a swiftly advancing attacker, would they have been able — inside of a few precious seconds — to have retrieved a



Richard F. LaMountain

key from a drawer, inserted it swiftly and precisely into a trigger lock and disengaged a gun? Or to have dialed a combination lock speedily and accurately enough to have opened a safe?

If not, would the attackers have been sporting enough to have let them do so?

Gov. Brown, says her spokeswoman Liz Merah, "believes that public safety is one of the most important responsibilities of government." If so, let the governor answer this: How does government promote public safety by hindering citizens' ability to protect themselves from attack in their own homes?

Crime researcher John Lott is blunt: "More lives will be lost than saved if everyone locks up their guns." Indeed, he notes, in states with gun-lockup laws, "there were 300 more total murders and 4,000 more rapes occurring each year." Part of the reason? Aware of such laws in their jurisdictions, says Lott, "criminals become more emboldened to attack people in their homes."

If SB 554 is enacted, is there any doubt criminals will become equally emboldened here?

In the bill's preamble, its sponsors seek to justify mandatory gun lockups by citing cases of Oregon children who have killed or injured themselves with unsecured firearms. And in Oregon and elsewhere, there are too many such incidents. But tragic as they are, says Lott, "so too is the much larger number of cases where people aren't able to protect themselves and their families from criminals."

Here's some perspective. In 2017, reported the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 62 children between the ages of 1 and 14 suffered a fatal firearm accident. But the CDC also has noted this: "Almost all national survey estimates indicate that defensive gun uses by victims are at least as common as offensive uses by criminals, with estimates of annual uses ranging from about 500,000 to more than 3 million."

And — as is the case in the two

Oregon incidents cited above — among those protected by such defensive uses are the very children whose welfare, ostensibly, is so vital to the sponsors of SB 554.

The way to prevent children's gun accidents is through education — not by forcing parents to lock away the guns they someday might need to protect those children. One of the nation's premier gun-accident prevention programs — the National Rifle Association's "Eddie Eagle" — has, in recent decades, taught firearms safety to millions of children. Gun owners should assure their children receive this program's vital training.

As mentioned above, SB 554 is scheduled to become law early this fall. However, with the help of sensible Oregonians, it may yet be derailed.

A group of Second Amendment advocates has launched the "Responsible Response" campaign to refer SB 554 to the November 2022 statewide ballot for a yes-or-no vote of Oregon voters. To qualify its measure, the campaign needs to collect the signatures of 74,680 registered voters on Referendum Petition 301 by Sept. 25. If it does, the bill's enactment will be delayed pending the vote's outcome. If voters approve the bill, it will become law; if they reject it, it won't.

To sign the petition, go to responsibleresponse.com and print, sign and mail a single-signature petition to the listed address. Or come to the Grant County Fair between Aug. 11 and Aug. 14 and sign a petition at the Responsible Response booth in the Trowbridge Pavilion.

Together, we can defeat SB 554's attack on our gun rights — and on our families' safety.

Richard F. LaMountain, a resident of Mt. Vernon, is a former assistant editor of Conservative Digest magazine. His freelance work has appeared in The Oregonian, Investor's Business Daily, USA Today and many other publications. LaMountain was an official chief sponsor of Oregon's latest successful referendum: 2014's Ballot Measure 88, via which voters rejected the Oregon legislature's attempt to grant state-sanctioned driving privileges to illegal immigrants.

GUEST COMMENT

False information harmful

By John Day City Council

There has been a lot of discussion lately about John Day's budget and priorities. As city councilors, we want to affirm that our efforts have been in the best interests of our residents and community. We work for you.

It was a difficult decision to refer a local option levy to our voters to help fund the police department. We did it after careful consideration of the economic impacts to our residents and following months of discussions with our staff and officers about the financial challenges facing the police department, which has run increasing budget deficits for the past 20 years.

The members of the Budget Committee, who are all John Day residents, unanimously agreed to refer the police levy because they value the police department's services. They also recognize that the cost for this service has grown so large (1.5 times our property tax receipts) it can no longer be fully funded through our General Fund revenues. The information presented to the committee is on our website under "Latest News." Individuals outside of John

Day have questioned our motives, claiming we are deliberately misleading the public and citing figures from our budget they clearly don't understand. They have also claimed our urban renewal programs are depriving other public agencies of their tax revenue, which is simply not true. John Day's urban renewal agency has led to the creation of new housing that will ultimately help our tax base and the other public agencies in Grant County, but no agency has lost revenue as a result of this program. That would be illegal, and we don't have the authority to do it. We plan to address these comments and false claims at our next town hall meeting.

Lastly, some Grant County residents have expressed concern about the city's land and property purchases to create public spaces that improve access and recreation within our city and rehabilitate buildings in our downtown. These investments are intended to put land back on the tax rolls at a higher value than it had before, either as buildable property or as public spaces for the community to use and enjoy. These efforts will ultimately widen our

tax base, allowing us to reduce the cost of our services per household and sustainably fund government functions.

There is so much our city has done to be excited about, including recent grant wins that reduced the cost of our wastewater treatment plant by 75%; funding for a new pool and Kam Wah Chung interpretive center; and our roads and riverfront parks now under construction. We understand when residents have concerns. We encourage them to ask questions or voice opposing opinions. These help us govern well. However, spreading false or incomplete information is ultimately harmful to our discourse and our community members.

We need time for our programs and policies to take root, but they are working! Thank you for your support, and if you have any questions, please reach out to a member of the city council.

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