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To: [Benton Public Comment](#)
Subject: LU-24-027 RE: Coffin Butte Landfill & the Perils of Privatization- Gazette Times January 23, 2024
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From: BECKY MERJA

Sent: Monday, January 27, 2025 7:22 AM

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Subject: Coffin Butte Landfill & the Perils of Privatization- Gazette Times January 23, 2024

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Commissioners, FYI, In case you missed this very well written As I See It:

COFFIN BUTTE AND THE PERILS OF PRIVATIZATION

Written by Barry Reeves and published by the GT on January 23rd.

Amidst the discussions around the ongoing environmental calamity that is Republic Services' Coffin Butte Landfill, it is difficult to come to grips with just how, exactly, we've arrived at this dilemma. The "dilemma" in question includes these features:

- The landfill in north Benton County receives fully one-third of all the garbage from Western Oregon. Less than 7% comes from Benton County.
- The landfill is owned by Republic Services, headquartered in Phoenix, the second largest solid waste company in the United States
- The landfill is emitting vast amounts of methane, a greenhouse gas whose impact on global warming is 30 to 90 times greater than that of carbon dioxide.
- Republic Services is requesting an expansion of the existing landfill. So how did we arrive here, in a county, and near a community, Corvallis, that is considered a hub for sustainability? The answer, I believe, lies in an understanding of the impact of the neoliberal economic model that has, like a toxic cloud, influenced our economic/political decisions for more than four decades. This ideology has been the central driver of record levels of income inequality, increasing homelessness and environmental degradation. Referred to

by other names — Reaganomics, trickle-down economics, etc. — neoliberal economics has these components:

- Small government — whatever government does, the "private sector" can do better more "efficiently"
- Deregulation — regulations hamper growth and innovation and are "costly"
- Privatization — privatizing government functions leads to greater "efficiency"
- Austerity policies that cut government funding for social programs
- Free trade policies (NAFTA, etc.) that allow jobs to be moved abroad where labor costs are lower and environmental regulations less stringent.

Coffin Butte, then, can be seen as a case study on the long-term impact of privatizing a municipal function, waste management, within the belief structure of neoliberalism. Rather than a function of local government, with the possibility of oversight and accountability, a large corporation will manage the site to benefit shareholders and to maximize profit. As local governments cede control over municipal functions, they become more beholden to their corporate "partners" and less beholden to their citizen "stakeholders."

As the power relationships evolve, a management/consulting class takes on the role of intermediary between this corporate-government "partnership" and the public. Managers/consultants then are responsible for creating a veneer of collaboration between the corporation (Republic Services), local government and the public. This can take the form, for example, of citizens' advisory boards, often with catchy titles concocted by the manager/consultants ("Benton County Talks Trash").

This veneer of collaboration, however, is cover for the actual intention behind the process. That intention is, primarily, to manufacture consent within the narrow framework of the status quo and to siphon off activist energy. Should public participants/activists who choose to participate in these advisory boards refuse to "stay in their proscribed lanes" of discourse and decision-making, they will then find themselves stonewalled or marginalized. In other cases, the advisory board may simply be suspended.

The managerial/consultant class is also tasked with "partnering" with environmental groups. This "partnership" involves "greenwashing" — giving an appearance of environmental stewardship. The effect, also, is

to blunt or co-opt environmental groups who are incentivized, like citizen's advisory boards, to "stay in narrow lanes" and avoid any serious threat to the status quo. Deregulation, taking many forms, enhances this power dynamic between public good on the one hand and corporate interests on the other, favoring of course, the latter! Though there is no quick fix for our dilemma, as a starting point, we should absolutely forbid any expansion of Coffin Butte landfill. As the saying goes, "If you've dug yourself into a hole, the first step to take is to stop digging!"

Barry Reeves was an emergency medicine physician in Corvallis for many years. His interests and focus include social justice, nonviolence and community building as a pathway to respond to the dual threats of rising authoritarianism and environmental disruption from climate change.