

Opinion / Politics

— EDITORIAL —

Questioning Planning Commission appointments

This month, three open positions within the Baker County Planning Commission were filled with incumbents. That's fine. Experience is good when not corrupted.

What's not fine was the vote by two of our three Commissioners—we believe Mark Bennett abstained—to simply reappoint when three other applicants from across the county had taken their time and effort to apply for those volunteer positions.

Volunteers, these days, are hard to come by.

Those applications weren't even reviewed, which we find disrespectful. One of those three applications, which was initially confirmed as received, was then somehow lost in the shuffle on top of it all.

To add insult to injury, one of those incumbents, Rob Crawford out of Halfway, is currently being investigated as it turns out, for dodging the legal

permitting and inspection process on his own construction project.

Now, it bothers us to no end the fact that freedoms have slipped away to the point at which a private property owner has to ask permission from a government entity to build a house addition on their own land. It grates.

But Crawford, in his position on the Planning Commission, has faithfully agreed to help interpret and uphold those laws, and apply them fairly to permit applicants. Not following that process himself is a study in blatant hypocrisy at worst, ignorance at best—either of which makes him unsuitable for the position he holds.

It's ironic that in past cases, Crawford, who appears to lean to the far liberal side on most topics, has been one of the voices most opposed to upholding property owner rights and freedoms as evidenced during public discussions during Planning Commission meetings this year.

In addition, as this investigation was going on since spring, and was known by County officials, why, we ask, did Commissioners Nichols and Harvey vote to reinstate Crawford when there were three viable applicants they could have considered instead?

Crawford should either resign or be removed. Commissioners should turn back to those three unconsidered applicants and thoughtfully select one of them.

—The Baker County Press Editorial Board

— GUEST OPINION —

This year's audit plan

By Dennis Richardson

As Oregon's Chief Auditor, I am proud to announce the 2017-18 Audit Plan. The Audit Plan is a new document our Secretary of State's office will be releasing annually. It includes a brief overview of the functions of the Audits Division and a list of planned audits for 2017-2018, including initial scope and objectives. (Additional audits may be added to the Plan, as circumstances warrant.)

This year's plan includes audits focused on security and information technology; vulnerable populations; finance, revenue, and fiscal sustainability; education; and, public health and safety.

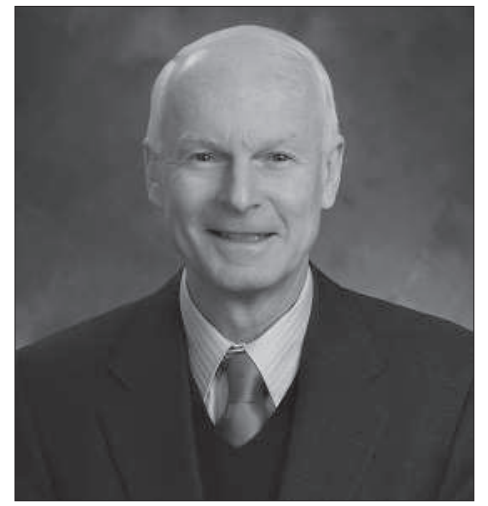
The Audit Plan addresses two commitments I made during last year's campaign: first, we'll be tracking education money from the Department of Education to Portland Public School District as a focal point (PPD is the state's largest school district with 49,189 students). In addition, I heard the pleas of women who are angry and frustrated about the number of Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence (SAFE) kits that are sitting on Oregon law enforcement open investigation shelves, while rapists remain on the streets.

The backlog of "rape kits" was the subject of a 2015 audit, which found the number of unprocessed SAFE kits was substantial. We'll do a follow-up audit of the Oregon State Police Forensic Services Division to see what progress has been made in processing and closing these tragic criminal cases and putting the perpetrators behind bars.

If you are interested in how our Audits Division functions, how audits are chosen, and the list of proposed audits for the next two years, please read the 2017-18 Audit Plan.

What you will not see in the Audit Plan is a listing for the Business Energy Tax Credit (BETC) program, Cover Oregon, or the Columbia River Crossing project. I have not forgotten about my promises to audit these three incredibly expensive and wasteful boondoggles. Each of them will get attention during my term in office after more urgent audits are concluded.

The BETC program was subject to an independent audit conducted in 2016. I have personally reviewed that Audit Report and other sources of relevant information, and I'll write my analysis in an upcoming newsletter. Although during last year's campaign, I promised a thorough audit of the BETC program, now that I have access to all the information available to the Secretary of State, I have sufficient



Submitted Photo

Former State Rep. Dennis Richardson is now Oregon's Secretary of State.

knowledge to provide the findings needed to avoid repeating the BETC debacle. In short, with the limited personnel and resources in our Audits Division, I'm making a "quarterback call" and will focus those resources where they can have the greatest impact for the future.

The Cover Oregon audit will occur during my term, but must wait until after the more urgent Oregon Health Authority (OHA) audit and follow-up audits are completed. OHA continues to be a top audit priority and is embroiled in scandal over wasting tens of millions of tax dollars for benefits paid to ineligible recipients. The waste figures presented in last spring's "OHA Audit Alert," underestimated the true extent of the problem. Now, OHA has a new director, Pat Allen, who deserves to know the full extent of the hole OHA dug for itself. When current OHA audits are completed, we'll refocus on determining the lessons learned from the Cover Oregon calamity.

The Columbia River Crossing audit will have to wait until our transportation industry/project auditors are available. This will occur during my term and before the next Columbia River bridge replacement project gets underway.

In conclusion, making today's 2017-18 Audit Plan public is just another step we are taking in your Secretary of State's Audits Division to make our government more open and transparent. By publicly announcing the agencies and topics we intend to audit, as well as by sharing our vision for the Audits Division moving forward, we hold ourselves to the same standards of accountability and transparency we are looking for in all state agencies.

The money you pay in taxes is precious, and you deserve to know that someone is watching out for your best interests. As your Secretary of State, it is my pledge to do all in my power to help Oregon state government be more economical, efficient, and effective.

It is an honor to serve as your Secretary of State.

Big employers face new scheduling law

Governor Brown ceremonially signed the predictive scheduling bill at 10 a.m. Wednesday, Sept. 20, in the Governor's Ceremonial Office.

Senate Bill 828, the na-

tion's first statewide "fair scheduling" bill, requires large employers to give employees a week's notice regarding scheduling changes.

Speakers at the ceremony

included Governor Brown, Emerson Wood, a Portland worker who will be impacted by SB 828, and Wendy Collie, CEO of New Seasons.

Walden calls for forest management reform

Rep. Greg Walden (R-Hood River) called for action last Wednesday on forest management reform. During a hearing of the Energy and Commerce Committee, Walden stressed the urgent need to address the underlying issues leading to devastating fires, which pour pollutants into the atmosphere and pose a serious threat to air quality, water quality, and Oregon's public lands.

"I want to focus on this air quality issue, especially as it relates to wood stoves and what is happening in the West. Year after year, we have catastrophic wildfires on federal lands, some of which have been set aside and managed in a way that they have no management," said Walden. "So if you want to do something that is

extraordinarily important, join us in reforming the way we manage our precious public lands and federal forests to reduce the fuel loads."

Walden's Energy and Commerce Committee examined the impact of burdensome regulations and policies on wood stoves in rural Oregon. Walden said overbearing regulations force rural communities in Oregon to decide between risking air quality restrictions that could prohibit economic growth, or forcing residents to purchase expensive wood stoves that meet new regulations. Communities in Oregon have spent upwards of \$1.5 million to help consumers afford new stoves. Walden said these communities are trying to scrape by to heat their homes in the winter,

and are inundated with smoke from devastating fires in the summer that make it difficult to breathe.

Walden also highlighted the need to pass the Resilient Federal Forests Act, marking the fifth time in five years the House is moving forward with major federal forest policy reforms. This legislation provides new tools and streamlines forest management to clean up the fuel loads that contribute to large-scale fires.

Earlier, Walden joined U.S. Forest Service Chief Tony Tooke and his colleagues in the Congressional and Senate Western Caucus at a news conference on the pressing need for forest management reform.

Wyden urges UAS use in fighting wildfires

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden and U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio today asked federal officials what's being done to deploy more unmanned aerial systems (UAS) to fight wildfires raging throughout Oregon and the West.

As Ranking Member of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee,

Rep. DeFazio last year authored legislation that directed the Federal Aviation Administration, Department of the Interior, and Department of Agriculture to expedite the safe use of UAS to support firefighting operations. The legislation was passed into law as part of the FAA Extension Act of 2016.

The letter from the two lawmakers seeking answers about using UAS as a firefighting tool comes in the wake of their meetings last weekend in Oregon with emergency responders battling wildfires around the state. Wildfires this year ripped through more than 7.65 million acres in Oregon and the west.

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Published weekly every Friday.
Subscription rates per year are \$29.95 all areas,
e-mail delivery. \$39.95 print issue, home delivery,
Baker City city limits only. \$49.95 print issue,
mail delivery, outside Baker City city limits only.
Payment in advance.

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