



# Building Trust

Is Eugene really as polarized as we believe?

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The below remarks were given as a keynote address at the Citizens for Public Accountability annual meeting May 14.*

**W**e are in a world of hurt economically here in Oregon and the human toll grows daily. Our schools are under-funded, our health care system is in disarray, and our unemployment rate is the highest in the nation. Our most vulnerable citizens are losing the support that provides them housing, medical treatment or other basic needs. We find ourselves mocked by "Doodlesbury" and discussed in major editorials across the nation.

One part of me thinks we deserve the mocking and the other part of me laments the current national portrayal of Oregon. For more than a decade too many of us have been bystanders to the steady erosion of all that makes Oregon special. We stand on the laurels of the past, when Oregon led the nation in quality of education, protecting our beaches, recycling our bottles, land use planning and the Oregon Health Plan. We now find ourselves mired in short-term crisis and unable to move forward with long term visionary planning for our state and its people.

Our Legislature is in the hands of those who were elected on an anti-government platform. Those who aim to destroy government have, for all practical purposes, succeeded in immobilizing it, making it essentially unable to adequately respond to the needs of everyday citizens. This immobilization only reinforces the growing distrust of government.

Eugene is better off than many communities, yet we are known for endless bickering and polarization in our public debate and policy making. Every day someone talks to me about this polarization and their dislike of it. I sometimes wonder if we get talked into thinking we are more polarized than we really are. There are many things most Eugeneans agree on. We want to manage our growth in a way that we can continue to have a community we are proud of. We want jobs with good benefits and decent wages. We support human and civil rights. We want high quality education opportunities for our children, from pre-school through higher ed. We want a sound social service infrastructure to care for our most vulnerable citizens. We want a health care system that is accessible to all. We want prevention of crime and justice for all. We want clean air and water. There are more that you could add.

Certainly we don't all agree on how to achieve these community goals, but we could pause and acknowledge that most of us — no matter our politics — want these things for our community. There are things that we think and do, though, that get in the way.

- There is a general distrust of policy makers from all sides. This comes to us because of the political messages we hear and the way we go about working together.
- We too often vilify those with whom we disagree.
- We believe we are cheated if we do not get our way.
- Money plays too heavy a role in decision-making.
- We feel frustration in a fast-moving world where we have few ways to impact decisions.

• We too seldom put all the community pieces together. We just look at the separate parts, the ones we are most interested in.

- We do not tout our successes at working together and build on them.
- We too often don't honor past agreements.
- We feel compromise is "giving it away" and not standing by our values. We don't listen to each other with the intention or possibility of hearing something that will alter our thinking. We worry that the game is already being played on the other side of the court and any movement only supports a further move in that direction.

In short we lack trust. Building trust and learning how to bring diverse views to the table in order to build a common vision for our community is important. Perhaps learning how to do it well is as important or even more important than the actual decisions we make.

I invite you to think about this with me.

*Kitty Piercy of Eugene is a former state representative and current public affairs director for Planned*

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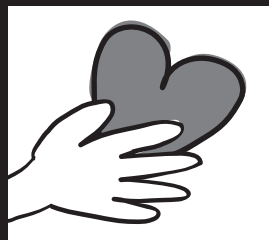
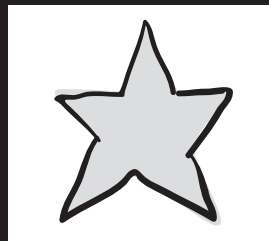
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