

Work that Matters

David Kelly's commitment to local democracy

David Kelly is no help if you want to be cynical about politicians. He's been a Eugene city councilor for eight years, faithfully conversing with any and all Eugeneans who approach him about issues the City Council is debating or should be debating. It hasn't mattered whether you have money or not; whether you have political power or not; whether you are mainstream or sidestream. What has seemed to matter to David is whether you have good information and practical proposals for the good of the community.



If your information conflicted with information he already had, he was generally skeptical. But his skepticism is joined at the hip with an even larger, native curiosity. So he would ask you hard questions. He might ask you for documented evidence, or he might check your information with other sources. Crucially, he wasn't afraid to change his mind if you brought better information or wiser ideas.

In fact, it appears Councilor Kelly was not particularly afraid of anything or anyone. Perhaps that's because he didn't regard *himself* as the point of being councilor. The point was supporting his ward; Eugene; its communities; its polity. The point was practical, public interest decisionmaking for the city's present and future. This community-centeredness, I think, was the source of his impressive grace during those moments he was faced by rudeness, lampooning (e.g., by the Gang of Nine) or other bullying.

David read the inch-thick packets prepared for City Council meetings. After all, he had often requested a fair amount of the information that was in those packets. He kept files, allowing for his legendary, at-the-fingertips institutional memory of what decisions or commitments had been made when by whom. He respectfully paid attention to his fellow councilors and mayors. In other words, for the past eight years, David has been wholly present at the governing table.

And this is the important thing: Being a public servant like David Kelly does not require being "left" or "right" or "centrist." It doesn't require a particular stance on abortion or gay marriage or God or Iraq or taxes, private property or growth.

All it requires is a commitment to democratic processes. A sensitivity to the reality that after you're elected, everyone, not just those who voted for you or paid for your campaign, has to live with (or maybe die from) your decisions. A sense that ordinary people subject to your decisions deserve to be able to change your mind through their good ideas and information.

Of course, that means a lot of work for ordinary people like you and me: If we want to sway one of these democracy-oriented officials, we have to gather the good information and provide wise ideas. And if we succeed in convincing a David Kelly that a new proposal or change of course is wise, we have to help him convince his fellow decisionmakers and community. (In fact, it may mean the hard work of *being* a David Kelly. After all, when he decided to run for City Council, David was just one of those ordinary neighborhood association members who had been challenging the Moon Mountain development.)

It would be interesting if instead of asking political candidates questions like, "How will you vote on abortion?" we asked, "Can you tell us some stories of when and why you changed your mind on a political matter due to conversations with someone?" and "Under what circumstances might a single, ordinary person have as much sway on your decision on a business issue as a corporation?"

If I had to choose between a politician who would always vote the way I want (i.e., be a puppet), and a politician who would vote on the basis of what he/she thinks is best for the whole community, after listening to and considering alternatives and solid information, I would choose the latter.

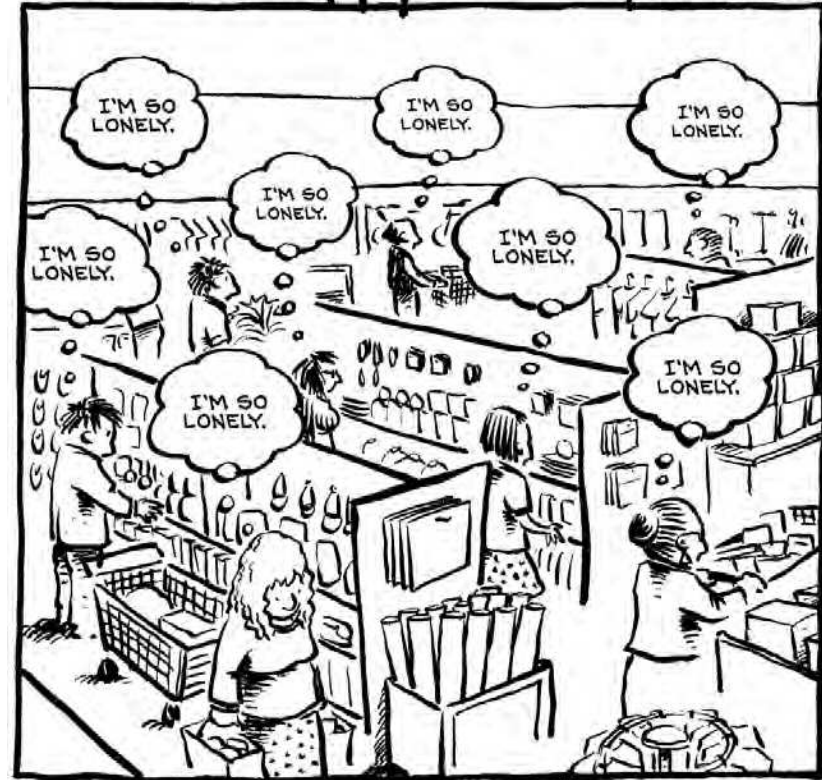
Maybe in the end it comes down to this: Do we cynically believe that all politicians are, in the end, puppets of powerful people and/or money? Or do we believe some politicians are committed to listening outside the proverbial closed doors, and thinking hard about what they hadn't previously considered?

The safe thing about political cynicism is that then you don't have to work hard, because whatever you do won't matter anyway. But then don't think about David Kelly.

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How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler



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Letters TO THE EDITOR

ONE-SIDED STORY

I was surprised — and shocked — by your Slant column and Alan Pittman article (11/30) on the presence of the police in the new City Hall building plans. The opinions of 80 percent of the people who attended the planning sessions were not even mentioned. Was that because they did not agree with you? The reasons for seven of the eight city councilors deciding to separate the police patrol were not mentioned. What gives?

Alan's comments on the value of the combined City Hall and police were really weak. Yes, some of the police functions could be moved "upstairs," but the patrol needed the bottom floors with two exits to get the cars out. Their personal cars would have to be "somewhere else." The value of "oversight" was really weak. Detectives should be able to look into lockers — wherever they are. Oversight by other city staff of the city manager is hardly a value. Integrating the "culture" of the police with the rest of the world is sheer imagination.

If misbehavior is going on in the police department, then what we need is a performance auditor or a new police chief. We don't need citizen volunteers looking over their shoulders. Councilor Bettman is probably right. If we move the police out of the City Hall plans, a bond measure for a new City Hall would not pass — at least not right now.

It's too expensive for our present economy. Getting a site lined up for the future is a good idea. And moving the entire police department out of City Hall is an even better idea. The police chief doesn't need an office next to the city manager any more than the fire chief needs it.

Bob Cassidy
Eugene

though I've certainly got other things that need to get done.

Kera Abraham is indeed a brave woman, taking on a very difficult topic and writing it very well. I'm not concerned if she got all the facts straight (every piece of reporting is ultimately hearsay and usually ends up being a little misconstrued anyway), but it does seem like she did do her research and tried her damn best. Furthermore, it comes as no surprise to me that this same woman wrote the well-balanced piece on Critical Mass in *EW* ("Spokes People," 8/10/06). I think you got a keeper, *EW*.

Today, after a wonderful Thanksgiving playing in the snowy forests that we are so blessed with (often with thanks due to said so-called "eco-terrorists"), I came back to town and settled down to the latest installment. Looking at the letters and the strong convictions expressed by Dennis Ramsey, Chris Calef and Steven Glider shows that we really have something to be thankful for regarding this whole situation. It was clearly an important part of Eugene (and Pacific Northwest) history and one which has left an indelible mark.

One thing that has made me love Eugene of all places is the fact that many of these and other important, relevant, "life and death issues" are so actively discussed by the community at large. Even the status quo here are better informed, free(er) thinkers than where I'm from, back on the other side of the Mississippi. We need to continue pushing and fighting for whatever we believe in, experimenting and learning as we go how to push and fight better.

Keep on fighting the good fight and be thankful for it.

Walter Lapchynski
Eugene

THE GOOD FIGHT

I've never been so excited to read the *Weekly*. Don't get me wrong, I always peruse it, but it's not my biggest priority. However, this "Flames of Dissent" piece has me pumped — so much so that here I am writing a letter to *EW* for the first time

BE THE ONE

Thanks to Kera Abraham for her historical perspective, "Flames of Dissent." "What is said by great employers of labor against agitators is unquestionably true. Agitators are a set of interfering, meddling people who come down to some perfectly

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