

Police Chief Accountability

HOW WILL EUGENE CHOOSE ITS NEXT CHIEF?

Eugene Police Chief Pete Kerns recently announced he will retire in the next month or so. His departure affords our community a critical opportunity to ensure that the leadership of our local law enforcement maintains and instills the values we believe are essential to a just and fair city.

Especially now, as the Trump regime ratchets up hate, ignorance and intolerance around the country, it is vital that the leader of our police force — who have legal authority to kill and imprison citizens — is accountable to us and represents our morals and values as a welcoming place regardless of race, gender identity, immigration status, economic status, religion, disability or mental health status or political belief or activist engagement.

During his tenure, Chief Kerns was ultimately responsible for several high-profile incidents of police misconduct. In fall 2015, Eugene police officer Will Stutesman shot and killed Brian Babb, a veteran of the Afghanistan war, while Babb was standing on his own doorstep.

“The deadly encounter occurred less than an hour after Babb’s therapist called 911 to report that Babb, who suffered from severe post-traumatic stress disorder and a traumatic brain injury, was suicidal and had fired a gun in the house,” *The Register-Guard* writes in an October 2015 news story. “Babb’s family members and the therapist have criticized the department for escalating the situation by calling for an armored response-and-rescue vehicle, known as a BearCat, during its response and interrupting [Becky] Higgins’ efforts to calm Babb over the phone by using the vehicle’s loudspeaker to order him out of his house unarmed.”

Kerns backed the actions of the officer saying that he made a decision that aligned with the protocol of the department. No discipline or accountability occurred because of this shooting, which is now the focus of a pending wrongful-death and civil rights action brought by his teenaged children.

Additionally, Kerns oversaw, yet provided no discipline or accountability to police officers regarding a July 16, 2016, police misconduct incident where an African-American mother called 911 for medical crisis intervention services when her teenage son was having a psychotic break. Police responded by brutalizing them — including tasing the 19-year-old victim. The Eugene Police auditor upheld the allegations made in a civilian complaint and determined that EPD had “unsatisfactory performance” and recommended disciplining the officers.

Chief Kerns decided that the officer was acting within EPD policy on the use of force. Kerns rarely agreed to discipline an officer for unlawful use of excessive force or for violating the civil rights of a member of the public.

In selecting the next chief of police, we the people must ensure that critical improvements occur in EPD hiring practices, training, supervision, and implementation of discipline. We need to ensure that changes to police policies and practices also occur — like ending racial and economic profiling by cops, including enjoining the criminalization of homeless and mentally ill community members.

We also need to ensure that local cops are not used as pawns to punish dissent or to target people for exercising their First Amendment rights of assembly and expression.

At this time, it is unclear how this hiring process will unfold. Will the city allow our unelected city manager to hire the chief of police on his own? Who will have a seat at the table and how large will that table be when it comes to reviewing, interviewing and providing feedback on the qualifications and desirability of a particular candidate?

Only through complete transparency will this process serve the people and offer any hope of police accountability. It is time for all social justice organizations and individuals to join together to exert power and influence in contrast to the usual moneyed individuals and entities who dominate this type of decision-making in Eugene. Only with a united front and unified vision of what we want in a chief of police will we have any real say on who replaces Chief Kerns.

If you or your organization want to join the CLDC in calling for an open, transparent hiring process that will ensure our next police chief will uphold human rights and social justice for all, and will enforce a zero-tolerance policy that forbids police brutality and misconduct, send an email to info@cldc.org, and we will add you to our working group email list.

Lauren Regan is the executive director and senior attorney at the Civil Liberties Defense Center. For the past 20 years she has sued police departments, including the Eugene Police Department, for federal civil rights violations and police misconduct. For more info on the CLDC and our upcoming Know Your Rights trainings, go to cldc.org.

BEACH BEER!

If anybody enjoys drinking a beer or a glass of wine on the beach like free Oregonians have always been able to do, you’d better contact the following state legislators and tell them where they can stuff House Bill 3441. This ill thought out bill alleges to curb litter on the beaches by banning alcohol while ignoring the Cheeto bags, soda cans, fast food wrappers and other detritus that actually account for the bulk of the waste. Additionally, the ban ignores the fact that littering is already illegal.

Make no mistake about it — this bill is nothing but anti-drinker intolerance from the morally superior.

The following representatives and one senator have signed on to support the bill. Tell them what you think. I also recommend calling your local representative: Rep. Janeen Sollman 503-986-1430 (Sponsor; Hillsboro), Rep. Phil Barnhart 503-986-1411 (Eugene), Rep. John Lively 503-986-1412 (Springfield), Rep. Mitch Greenlick 503-986-1433 (Portland), Rep. Sherry Malstrom 503-986-1427 (Beaverton), Rep. Susan McLain 503-986-1429 (Hillsboro) and Sen. Mark Hass 503-986-1714 (Beaverton).

P.S. I called Rep. Lively and his aid told me that he would not pass on my message because Lively had already made up his mind. What a democratic move!

*Matt Watkins
Eugene*

BAN AERIAL SPRAYING

While I don’t live in Lincoln County, I have signed an almost identical petition in Lane County to ban the dangerous practice of aerial herbicide spraying in our county forests. We in Lane County, inspired by the local people of Lincoln, are working to get our own aerial spray ban initiative on the May 2018 ballot.

Lincoln County residents are willing and dedicated to stand up to corporate power and privilege that threatens our health, safety and welfare. Motivated by profits, big corporate heads, who live far away, do not have to live with the harms created by their activities right here in our neighborhoods, where we the people live.

We have a responsibility to future generations and an inalienable right to protect the air we breathe, the water we drink and the soil we tend.

Lincoln County residents, stand with your neighbors and tell outside influences that you will protect yourselves from corporate greed in general, and aerial herbicide spraying in particular, by voting Yes on 21-177.

*Jennifer Caughlin
Springfield*

‘CORRUPTION’ IS A LOADED WORD

I appreciate the *Eugene Weekly* honoring David Monk for his lifetime accomplishments and commitment to making this community a better place (3/23), especially as it immediately followed the Beyond Toxics celebration honoring all his work fighting for clean air and water for residents throughout the state of Oregon.

But I was shocked that the writer of “Happening People” used the loaded word “corruption” in his piece, implying that Monk used it. I have worked with Monk for at least two decades and knew instantly that he had not actually uttered the word “corruption.”

I have never heard Monk use that term to describe opponents to the change he seeks. He sees activism in terms of making things better and would not characterize peoples’ motivations in such a way.

I, on the other hand, have frequently said: “You can’t call it corruption anymore because they’ve made it legal.”

*Bonny Bettman McCornack
Eugene*

MORE PARADES FOREVER

I, and many others, sorely miss the good old Eugene Celebration Parade.

In these trying times we need more community focus, creative expression and levity. It seems that maintaining the Eugene Celebration was too hard, so let’s at least have periodic parades. I want to experience regular and all-inclusive expressions of our amazing Eugene-Springfield spirit.

Anybody want to organize an open-ended parade? I hope so!

*Richard Grimaldi
Eugene*

CURBING POLLUTERS

The Oregon Legislature has a chance to tackle two serious problems with the passage of one bill: the Clean Energy Jobs Bill (SB 557), which is currently working its way through the legislature is the product of three years’ worth of work.

This bill would put a cap and price on carbon dioxide emissions from the biggest polluters in the state and invest that money in clean-energy solutions such as installing solar panels and weatherizing buildings.

Studies have shown that the clean energy industry creates twice as many jobs as the fossil fuel industry. This bill is designed with a special focus on disadvantaged communities and rural areas where good, family wage jobs are hardest to find.

In addition, this bill would help implement Oregon’s emission reduction goals by giving the biggest emitters of carbon dioxide a financial incentive to cut back on their use of fossil fuels. To return our climate to stability we need to rapidly reduce the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere from the current 404ppm to 350ppm or below.

We need good jobs and we need a stable climate. Please urge your elected representatives in Salem to pass the Clean Energy Jobs Bill in this legislative session.

*Carolyn Partridge
Eugene*

NO TAXES FOR WAR

Taxes are due very soon. I love paying taxes for life-affirming things and would be happy to pay even more to ensure free good public education from early intervention through college, free good health care and a social system that ensured everyone had a home and enough to eat.

I would also love paying taxes toward cleaning up our environment, finding solutions to climate change and improving our