

BIG TIMBER ENTITLEMENT

Kelly Kenoyer's article "Rx: Fire" (June 22) hopefully generated some interest in prescribed burning in people other than foresters and ecologists.

The general public can learn more by reading *Indians, Fire and The Land In The Pacific Northwest*, edited by Robert Boyd. It is a collection of scholarly articles detailing how Native Americans used fire to manage resources for their hunter/gatherer lifestyle for thousands of years before the white man came to the area.

Another article in the same issue about the Goose timber sale makes it obvious, if you read between the lines, that both the Forest Service and private timber companies feel a sense of entitlement to lands they took from Native Americans for a song.

Read between the lines in *The Lewis and Clark Journals* and *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods* by James R. Gibson, and other similar books about the slow takeover of the Pacific Northwest by

European fur hunters, traders and settlers.

They all felt the territory was wide open and theirs for the taking.

Chuck West
Eugene

MAYOR'S EMPTY RHETORIC

I was quite surprised yet baffled to read Eugene Mayor Lucy Vinis' guest viewpoint ("Do More," June 26-22).

My surprise was that the mayor's viewpoint came out of the blue and seemed to be a defensive reaction to the pending ballot initiative for a publicly elected city auditor, although she was careful not to make any such reference. And, if she is as enthusiastic as she sounded, she could have attended the Gary Blackmer independent city auditor presentation, which was held at the library several weeks ago.

I was baffled that either the mayor didn't seem to understand why an "inside" city auditor (or performance auditor) will in fact be tainted and diminished by city control, or that she is not sincere about re-

viving trust and accountability in Eugene's city government.

I appreciate her stated goal "to improve our (the city's) framework for communicating and accounting...etc." However, that sounds more like empty political rhetoric, and does very little to revive taxpayer trust. If anything, her proposed performance auditor, as a hedge against an independent auditor, may instead further erode trust in the city.

An independent auditor who is free from city control is the only way the mayor will achieve her goal of reviving trust and accountability.

Brian Weaver
Eugene

EUGENE NEEDS INDEPENDENT AUDITOR

As someone who has long seen the need for an elected city auditor, I was disappointed by Mayor Lucy Vinis' June 22 column. She mentions the trend towards electing auditors as a way of ensuring their

independence, but fails to inform readers of the recently filed citizen-led initiative to create an elected independent auditor in Eugene.

No doubt she's aware. It's been in the news, and the mayor, councilors and city manager were all invited to the May 17 library presentation by government auditing expert Gary Blackmer. The former auditor for Portland, Multnomah County and the State of Oregon showed how elected auditors make cities more accountable to their citizens and significantly improve services, with cost savings covering the auditor's salary several times over.

How unfortunate that Vinis appears to want an essentially handpicked group of "shareholders" to write a competing initiative. I don't see how they could improve on giving Eugene voters the opportunity to elect a qualified independent auditor.

Only a publicly elected auditor — answerable to the citizens rather than the council or city manager — will provide the objective, unbiased reporting needed

VIEWPOINT BY BONNY MCCORNACK

'Accountability' vs. the Real Deal

A RESPONSE TO MAYOR LUCY VINIS ON A CITY AUDITOR

Readers of Lucy Vinis's June 22 viewpoint may have thought the mayor was voicing support for the citizens' initiative petition, filed in May, that would amend the Eugene City Charter to establish an Office of an Independent *elected* city auditor. But the mayor's intent, in sync with city officials, is to undermine the citizens' effort with their own self-serving version of an audit function.

In 2002, the city refused to pursue an auditor function, despite sending various other charter amendments to the voters. City officials have ducked this issue for the ensuing 15 years while presiding over escalating community distrust due to a lack of transparency and accountability. Suddenly, six weeks after citizens filed their petition, city officials have a newfound zeal for having an auditor.

The subtext of Vinis's editorial is the introduction of a city-orchestrated-and-subsidized process to create a *subordinate* auditor position — in order to thwart the citizens' initiative for a truly *independent* and autonomous City Auditor's Office.

It is important that the public understands the differences between the city's subordinate auditor — beholden to city officials and the citizens' proposal for an elected city auditor who is independent of council and/or manager control, and accountable to the public.

City officials will aggressively oppose opening their books to anyone they cannot influence, manage, penalize, fire, demote, stonewall or otherwise control.

For starters, an auditor who is appointed by the City Council and/or the city manager can see their responsibilities or position eliminated whenever a new manager or different council takes office. With the citizens' charter amendment only the voters can fire the auditor.

Vinis specifically rejects auditor oversight of "financial audits" saying, "We already have a strong audit department in our finance division."

Her bias underscores our initiative's emphasis on transparency and accountability. When auditors are subordinate it is city officials who decide whether or not to make audit reports public. Have you ever seen a finance division audit made public? In contrast, the city accountability petition measure guarantees that all audit reports, follow-ups, schedules and findings are available to the public and posted on the auditor's website.

Vinis thinks that the auditor shouldn't have oversight of financial audits because the city has it covered. But, the city's primary financial audit, the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) is limited to determining whether the city followed

certain accounting procedures. The CAFR's auditors are contracted by the manager and he provides them the data. Verifying the thoroughness and accuracy of the data is not the objective of those audits.

In stark contrast, the citizens' initiative authorizes the elected city auditor to conduct, or cause to be conducted, financial, compliance, performance, special studies or other audits of all aspects of the city of Eugene's government operations. Which means the elected city auditor can go to the source and verify the data's accuracy.

The city is laying the groundwork for an audit position that is subordinate to the manager and/or council, possibly with an appointed "audit committee." In such a case, the City Council and/or manager (and cherry-picked committee) will determine what the auditor may audit and, more importantly, what the auditor must not investigate. Such an auditor would have no control over their ability to access materials, evidence, and witnesses to complete an audit.

Alternatively, the citizens' initiative authorizes the auditor to have complete control over which audits to pursue and when. It also guarantees that the auditor has the authority to compel access to all data, material, witnesses, or evidence necessary to complete an audit.

Vinis casually suggests the city could share an auditor with Lane County. It's a bad idea, and serves to demonstrate the downside of having a competent, but subordinate, auditor who is forced to adhere to a limited objective as defined by the commission/committee — and where the data is provided by the supervising officials. Here is a direct quote from "Lane County Financial Indicators Audit," which is typical of this circumstance;

"As nearly all financial information presented is from the CAFR, we relied on the work performed by the County's external financial auditors. We reviewed other information for reasonableness and consistency. *We did not independently audit the accuracy of source documents.*"

In other words, they were not authorized by the commissioners to turn over any rocks or look under the rug. They did not investigate whether current department budgets are being spent cost-effectively.

Eugene's elected independent city auditor will be authorized to follow the money — if the ballot measure passes.

Former City Councilor Bonny Bettman McCornack is a chief petitioner along with former City Councilor George Brown and neighborhood leader David Monk, for the citizens' initiative to establish a Eugene Auditor's Office headed by an independent, elected city auditor. For more info: cityaccountability.org