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What's going on?

Suddenly, Scott Somers' righthand man is a nonperson

The sudden departure of Clatsop County's second-highest ranking executive was largely hidden from public view and never explained. Our reporter Kyle Spurr discovered a terse item on Dean Perez' leaving in county commission documents.

As head of the Department of Administrative Services and the county's human resources director, Perez was a big deal. He was County Manager Scott Somers' right hand. With 16 years of service, Perez was second only to District Attorney Josh Marquis in his longevity as a county department head.

In Somers' May 19 memo to county commissioners he said Perez was moving to Bothell, Wash., to become its human resources director.

What's going on here? Where does it fit within the questions surrounding Somers' management?

Perez was under pressure regarding a terminated sheriff's deputy whom an adjudicator said must be reinstated. But it could be argued Somers himself was just as responsible for that costly personnel matter.

The striking aspect of this story is the swiftness with which Perez disappeared, the ostensible elimination of his position and the absence of a clear story line. If this were China or the old Soviet

Union, we would assume the party hierarchy had made Perez into a nonperson.

The so-called 360 Review of Somers' management will give us a window on how the county is being administered. That process, done by Portland-based Kennedy Consulting, will presumably provide details on the many managerial departures under Somers' leadership.

There is an unfortunate tendency at the county to label questions about the many management changes as personnel matters, which shields them from public view. Now the county has reached a point where all managers have been swept from the playing board. We the taxpayers have a right to know whether there is a larger plan at work, or whether county government is bouncing from termination to termination.

The commission is the board of directors, and we the taxpayers are the shareholders. The public deserves from the Clatsop County Commission a systematic inquiry, as well as an element of candor and insight.

The return of the sea otter?

Now is time for us to help restore them to their former home waters

The last time sea otters were in the public consciousness around the Columbia River estuary and Willapa Bay, the Wright brothers were still learning to fly and the Titanic's sinking was big news.

In the quiet way of species edging into extinction, otters were shot for money and few took notice of their passing until there were none left.

A century later, it is now possible that sea otters are sidling back out of extinction along parts of the mainland West Coast, even though unfortunately two have recently been found dead on the seashore at Long Beach, Wash.

It may be these otters were living in local waters and encountered some difficulty, but a federal biologist speculates it is also possible they were part of a recovering colony of otters on the north Washington coast and that the southbound California Current delivered their bodies to Long Beach.

One or possibly two living otters were observed at the mouth of the Columbia in 2009, though it was suspected they were just passing through.

Since a few dozen Alaskan otters were transplanted to Washington state waters in 1969 and 1970, they have increased in numbers to more than 1,000. A recovery plan envisages an eventual total of up to about 2,700 in Washington waters. With luck, the deaths of the two otters is just a temporary setback on the way to this goal; like all wild animals, they naturally die from time to time. The goal is a self-sustaining population that is sufficiently widespread and genetically diverse enough to survive disasters like oil spills and plagues.

In California, a separate population of southern sea otters has reached a comparatively safe tally of around 3,000.

Sea otter recovery has been nowhere near as successful in Oregon. Here, a 1970s reintroduction program failed for unknown reasons. Occasional sightings in the past several years may be young adults venturing out for adventure from Washington or California.

At www.oregonwild.org/wildlife/otter-watch, Oregon Wild makes a good argument for resumption of efforts to restore otters in our state, where the last known resident otter was killed in 1907.

"Ongoing implications for marine ecosystems are far reaching," Oregon Wild observes. "Sea otters are a keystone species, which means their presence or absence has a huge impact on their environment. In marine habitats, sea otters help maintain balance by controlling populations of sea urchins. When sea otters are absent, sea urchins gobble up the kelp forests that many other species depend on for food and shelter. In Oregon, as kelp forests have declined, so to have populations of rockfish and many other kelp-dependent species."

Sea otters once were a pillar of the economy in Astoria and the Chinook Indian Nation, their rich pelts enticing the Chinese to provide silks and other luxury goods that were sold for gold by U.S., British, Russian and other traders. Having profited from their destruction, it now is time for us to help restore them to their former home waters.

The Oregon Department of fish and Wildlife should get busy with a sea otter recovery plan.

Summer tourism begins, but who plans all these events?

Bumper-to-bumper traffic is a bummer

Every town on the North Coast has its own way of signaling summer, and when summer does arrive on the weekend of June 20 this year, it will be duly noted by thousands of visitors.

From Cannon Beach to Astoria, the weekend promises to be filled with activities — if anyone can get to them.

My question is this: Do the planners of these events ever talk to each other?

In Cannon Beach, the Sandcastle Contest Weekend runs from June 19 to 21, when the tides are low enough to accommodate the crowds, cars and the sandcastle-crafters. That is also opening weekend for the Coaster Theatre's "Little Shop of Horrors."

Meanwhile, in Seaside, two of the city's largest events, the Seaside Beach Soccer Tournament and the Muscle and Chrome car show, will occupy the downtown core area.

Gearhart Golf Links will host the Greater Oregon Brew Tour on June 19.

Astoria will be the site of the annual Scandanavian Midsummer Festival June 19 through 21 at the Clatsop County Fairgrounds.

And, for those who can make it to the Long Beach (Wash.) Peninsula, the annual Northwest Garlic Festival is being staged in Ocean Park June 19 and 20.

And so, the summer begins. Last summer, traffic snarls caused consternation among drivers up and down the coast. When there's only one main road connecting those towns and every town has a big event, there's bound to be bumper-to-bumper traffic. And that's a bummer.

I admit that, after eight years of being a full-time North Coast resident, I'm becoming tired of seeing all the visitors in town every weekend. I'm turning into a curmudgeon who growls when six cars are parked in front of a vacation rental home on my street for an entire weekend.

At the same time, I know our area thrives on the generosity of strangers. Without them, we would have few resources to maintain the lifestyle we would like to become accustomed to.



EO Media Group file

Between 10,000 and 15,000 people, according to an informal estimate from City Councilor George Vetter, turned out for the 2014 Sandcastle Contest.

IMPRESSIONS



By NANCY MCCARTHY

Finding the balance

So there's the balance we need to consider. The Seaside Visitors Bureau and the Seaside Chamber of Commerce have done a bang-up job of attracting crowds to local events. Astoria's event planners also produce myriad tourism opportunities.

The Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce has managed to coax a 1 percent lodging tax increase out of the city's budget committee. Seventy percent of that increase will go to help the chamber bolster the staff at the information center, which, ultimately, will result in more "visitors and tourism" for Cannon Beach, according to City Manager Brant Kucera.

Yippeee. Just this past week, two of the "old guard" in Cannon Beach have died. Steve McLeod, an artist who may be remembered for his paintings of Haystack Rock that looked more like photographs when finished and who also created artwork from seaweed, lived in Cannon Beach since the time the town was an early arts colony.

Pat Friedland, former operator of Pat's Coffee Shop from the late 1970s to 1998, died May 30. She

lived a quiet life in Cannon Beach, but she was a generous benefactor to the local arts, conservation projects and student scholarships.

Those who raised a cup of black coffee in Pat's honor at a recent informal tribute, recalled how she used to tell the tourists who came to her shop on our rare sunny afternoons to head to the beach instead of to the stores.

That attitude may not be very popular now.

At another recent gathering of friends, a few people fondly recalled Cannon Beach's "old days," when the North Coast was sparsely populated and tourists were relatively unfamiliar with the area. When the town's gnarly "characters" were welcome and the town's streets weren't filled with day-trippers. They agreed those days are long gone.

We can't — and don't want to — send all the visitors away. We depend on them. Maybe too much.

My favorite season used to be summer. Now, it's winter. Especially January and February, the darkest time of the year. There are few cars parked on the streets. It's easier to drive on the highway. Local towns are quiet. Full-time residents turn to each other for company.

We may not be able to have that ambiance all the time here on the North Coast. But we need more conversations about what we do want here and how to plan for it.

We need to ask ourselves how much is too much.

Nancy McCarthy is a freelance writer who recently retired as editor of the Cannon Beach Gazette and the Seaside Signal. Her column appears monthly.

My road to the White House

By FRANK BRUNI
New York Times News Service

I know a hot trend when I see one and I hate to hop aboard too late. So here goes:

I'm announcing my candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination.

Sure, I have severely limited name recognition in the hinterlands and, come to think of it, in most urban, suburban and exurban areas as well. But that isn't stopping Lindsey Graham.

True, I have questionable hair (what's left of it). But that's not going to deter Donald Trump.

My weight has been known to fluctuate, but that connects me to Mike Huckabee, Chris Christie and Jeb Bush, whose Paleo regimen has worked slimming wonders. Forget his position on immigration and check out those new cheekbones! Memo to self: Out with the rigatoni, in with the rib-eye.

My legs aren't as sturdy as Rand Paul's. The only way I'd manage a marathon filibuster is if the Senate allowed a Barcalounger and microwave popcorn. But I don't share his unsettling habit of berating female journalists. I just beg the ones I know to retweet me.

And I have cool eyeglasses that make me look a whole lot smarter than I really am. I'll fit right in with Rick Perry.

Like Marco Rubio, I have an inspiring immigrant story. My forebears arrived penniless on these shores.

Unfortunately, their country of origin was Italy, which people no longer associate with struggle. They associate it with Prada and prosciutto.

to. One of these is central to my life.

Skeptics will focus on the pesky gaps in my résumé. I've never won election to any political office.

But neither have Trump, Ben Carson or Carly Fiorina, and her batting average, zero for one, is worse than mine, which is zero for zero. I'm undefeated.

I made the requisite trip to Israel, but it was ages ago and I stupidly neglected to alert the media, tote along a publicist, pose for photographs at the Western Wall and sup with Bibi. You live and you learn.

I haven't published a book with a title like *On My Honor* (Perry), *Rising to the Challenge* (Fiorina), *Tough Choices* (Fiorina again), *Unintimidated* (Scott Walker), *American Dreams* (Rubio), *American Patriots* (Rick Santorum), *Leadership and Crisis* (Bobby Jindal) or *Unbroken* (oops, wrong genre).

My memoir, *Born Round*, doesn't belong. But perhaps I can reissue it as *The Hunger for Greatness* or *Fire in the Belly*, if the latter doesn't sound too much like I just ate bad Thai.

Clearly I need a super PAC and a benefactor willing to float me, I don't know, \$10 million? Possibly \$15 million? Do I hear \$20 million?

I'll go to the highest bidder, and if it's for a sufficiently handsome sum, I could last until the Florida primary and charge a Coconut Grove hotel suite and dinner in South Beach to the campaign.

I used to think that faintness on voters' radar was an impediment to running. Hardly. In a recent Quinnipiac poll, 69 percent of respondents said that they didn't know enough



Frank Bruni

about Fiorina to have any opinion of her, 60 percent said the same about Carson, and 56 percent said that about Graham, even though he's been in Congress for two decades and had himself surgically conjoined with John McCain.

I used to think that a groundswell of support mattered. Not at all. Last I checked, Jindal and George Pataki were both polling below 1.5 percent. That must have them losing to the margin of error.

I used to think that a shot at victory was the point. Ha! There are spoils aplenty on the path to defeat.

I'll get to ride around in an Escalade with my very own Huma. Minions will buff my Facebook page. "Morning Joe" will beckon, and I hear that you leave the set with a commemorative mug.

I could even come out of this with my own show, provided that I'm not picky about the network, hour, format or guests. And with the right kind of stump speech and pandering, I could emerge as a deity to one micro-constituency or another and have a guaranteed place at podiums forevermore.

If I don't make the cut for the Fox News debate in August, I'll just watch it in a nearby pub with Pataki and Graham. Fun! We'll do shots of Wild Turkey whenever Walker mentions unions, Huckabee invokes God or Ted Cruz praises Ted Cruz.

On second thought, maybe we'll stick to seltzer.

I haven't mentioned a platform. What's the point? Christie was for the Common Core before he was against it. The Walker who ran for re-election in the Wisconsin governor's race and the one wooing Iowans are second cousins at best.

Every candidate turns to mush. So I, in a blow for integrity, will start out that way.

There are spoils aplenty on the path to defeat.