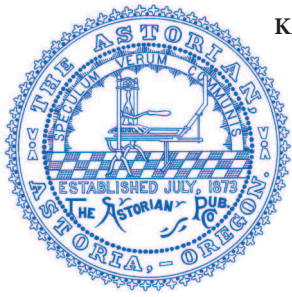


THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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OUR VIEW



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Secretary of State candidate Dennis Richardson, above, and Gov. Kate Brown should have known about the problems and promptly worked together to ensure a thorough, forthright audit of the Oregon Health Authority.

Health authority audit interference was outrageous

State officials went to great lengths to stymie an audit of the Oregon Health Authority.

That is the most troubling aspect of the audit, which state auditors were able to complete after Gov. Kate Brown appointed a new director for the beleaguered agency.

The audit report, which Secretary of State Dennis Richardson delivered last Wednesday in a highly politicized announcement, found that the agency inadvertently misspent millions of state and federal dollars. That is not a big surprise, as news about the agency's missteps has dribbled out for months. However, the audit also showed that the health authority is above average nationally for its handling of federal Medicaid money.

In that sense, the audit report contained both bad and good news regarding Oregon's \$9.3 billion-a-year Medicaid program. New Oregon Health Authority Director Patrick Allen, who on Friday marked his 90th day on the job, agreed with the auditors' recommendations and said the agency already was implementing some of them.

The report states that the health authority previously had impeded the auditors' work but goes on to say, "OHA's new management has been more proactive and transparent in addressing these issues."

Audits are an integral part of cost-effective governance. Brown ousted former health authority Director Lynne Saxton this summer; but it's disconcerting that until then, the agency aggressively interfered with what could be considered a routine audit.

That interference included hiring an outside auditing firm as an intermediary between the health authority and the state Audits Division. That seems unprecedented in state government. Allen said he canceled the outside firm's \$200,000 contract as soon as he learned about it.

According to the audit report, the health authority also had monitored what its staff was telling auditors, potentially creating a chilling effect, and ordered front-line workers to go through management instead of communicating with auditors.

"Preventing direct follow-up slowed our work, potentially limited our access, and created a bottleneck for both us and OHA. We had questions that staff could answer in minutes, but were instead required to ask managers, who sometimes provided incorrect information because they lacked the same level of familiarity as staff," the report says. In addition, "OHA delayed answering requests and at times provided incomplete or erroneous information."

Such interference, regardless of where it occurs in government, is outrageous. Republican Richardson, who oversees the Audits Division, and Democrat Brown, who oversees the Oregon Health Authority and other agencies in the executive branch, should have known about the problems and promptly worked together to ensure a thorough, forthright audit.

Their failure to do so creates a stain on state government.

LETTERS WELCOME

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All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and, on occasion, factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are printed each month.

Letters written in response to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and, rather than

mentioning the writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil and people should be referred to in a respectful manner.

Submissions may be sent in any of these ways:

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The ghost of Steve Bannon



AP Photo/Evan Vucci

President Donald Trump speaks on his decision to shrink the size of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments Monday in Salt Lake City.

By CHARLES BLOW

New York Times News Service

Steve Bannon may no longer be physically in the White House, but his spirit lingers there as the guide of the Donald Trump administration and the soul at the core of its beliefs.



Bannon is Dickensian in the way his presence — and nominal absence — haunts the Trump presidency, defining its past, dictating its present and damning its future.

Bannon is the author of Trump's ideology.

It is always worth remembering that Bannon, who departed the White House in mid-August and returned to his right-wing website Breitbart the same day, last year proudly told Mother Jones: "We're the platform for the alt-right."

Alt-right is just a new name for Nazis and racists.

Maybe more important, the Nazis and racists believe that Breitbart is a welcoming platform for them. A few days before Mother Jones published its interview with Bannon, The Daily Beast published this:

"Richard Spencer, who heads the white supremacist think tank National Policy Institute, said he was also pleased. Under Bannon's leadership, Breitbart has given favorable coverage to the white supremacist Alt Right movement. And Spencer loves it."

Yes, that Richard Spencer, the one who has led three tiki-torch hate marches in Charlottesville, the second of which resulted in the killing-by-car of counterprotester Heather Heyer. That was the same protest about which Donald Trump insisted that there "were very fine people on both sides."

The Daily Beast quoted Spencer saying: "Breitbart has elective affinities with the Alt Right, and the Alt Right has clearly influenced Breitbart ... In this way, Breitbart has acted as a 'gateway' to Alt Right ideas and writers. I don't think it has done this deliberately; again, it's a matter of elective affinities."

Whether it was deliberate or the result of "elective affinities," the two are drawn to each other out of shared interests and a shared worldview.

Even the phrase "elective affinities" is likely taken from the title of an 1809 novel by famed German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, although its usage traces back earlier.

That established, it is important to recall the three pillars of the Bannonic "America First" philosophy.

Trump the conman has a wingman and together, in the shadows, they are leading us to ruin.

Earlier this year at the Conservative Political Action Conference, Bannon outlined them: national security and sovereignty; economic nationalism; and deconstruction of the administrative state.

Everything Trump does or says falls into one of those buckets.

Last month, when Trump appointed Mick Mulvaney, a man who despises the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, to be acting director of that bureau, Trump continued his Trojan Horse strategy of implanting enemies in government agencies to disable or even destroy them.

When the desperate-for-a-win Republican Senate last week passed their 11th-hour disaster of a tax bill that will eventually prove a jackpot for the donor class and an albatross for the working class, Trump ensured that working people would most feel the pain from the bill, in cutbacks to government services like education and the social safety net.

Trump's continued attacks on the media — and on truth itself — is an attempt to weaken the watchdogs,

to grease the skids toward more oligarchy, more authoritarianism, more fascism.

Even as the special counsel, Robert Mueller, picks Trump's inner circle apart, Trump is fully focused on doing as much damage as possible before reaching his ever-more-likely demise.

Trump may one day have to abandon the post he inhabits, but he plans to reduce the village to ashes before he exits.

This sort of pumped-up, fatal heroism in service of white nationalism and in opposition to government sounds to me rather Bannonic.

And we know that Bannon still has the president's heart, as well as his ear.

As The Washington Post reported at the end of August, Trump continued to defy the wishes of his chief of staff John F. Kelly, including by reaching out to Bannon: "The president continues to call business friends and outside advisers, including former chief strategist Stephen K. Bannon, from his personal phone when Kelly is not around, said people with knowledge of the calls."

On Sept. 12, The Wall Street Journal reported that Bannon told a private group in Hong Kong that he "speaks with President Donald Trump every two to three days."

White House press secretary and chief twister-of-truths Sarah Huckabee Sanders cushioned the claim, telling reporters that the times Trump and Bannon spoke were "certainly not that frequently."

But The Post followed up in October, reporting that Trump and Bannon "have remained in frequent contact, chatting as often as several times a week," and that "Trump usually initiates the talks because incoming calls now are routed through chief of staff John F. Kelly and his disciplinarians."

The Post continued: "Bannon tells confidants he sees himself as 'the president's wingman,' tending to his base and taking on his enemies. Trump still frequently consults him, and Bannon believes he is executing the president's wishes."

Trump the conman has a wingman and together, in the shadows, they are leading us to ruin.