

OPINION



THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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OUR VIEW

State purchasing practices are indefensible

Oregon state government has been stunningly inefficient when buying computers and other technology.

In fact, agencies' buying habits are so bad that the state unnecessarily spent an extra \$400 million to \$1.5 billion during the 2015-17 budget period, according to a recent report from the state Audits Division.

The problem is ironic: antiquated systems of purchasing goods and services for information technology. Some of the purchasing systems date to the 1990s.

As a result, whereas one agency paid \$176.40 for a 24-inch Dell monitor, another paid \$241.15. The state bought 1,300 such monitors during the study period, according to the audit report, and could have saved more than \$16,500 if it bought at the lowest price.

In another example, agencies paid 131 different prices for the same Ricoh surge protector, ranging from \$65.90 to \$173.98. Prices also fluctuated widely for some software licenses and service contracts.

The state's woes in managing IT projects have been well-known, and the audit report says more improvements also are needed there.

National studies have shown that the majority of IT projects run into



AP Photo/Don Ryan

Workers process applications for Cover Oregon, the state's health exchange, in 2013. The program was abolished in 2015 after management and technological debacles.

significant issues, whether in the public or private sector. The technology itself is not to blame. The problems arise from human faults: arrogance in decision-making, internal rivalries, unrealistic expectations of what technology can do, equally unrealistic timelines, changing desires, mismanagement, lack of oversight and inadequate attention to testing.

All those showed up in the infamous Cover Oregon debacle.

As for buying IT products and services, the audit report criticizes technology as well as procedures. We are well into the 21st century, but unlike most corporations, the state lacks an overall purchasing system for products, whether com-

puters or those little adhesive notes known as "stickies."

The lack of a viable eProcurement system is indefensible and illustrates how public officials' claims of cost-efficiency do not always match reality. Technology purchases represent a fraction of the state's multi-billion-dollar budget. But if the lessons learned from this audit were applied to all state purchasing, the estimated savings could average from 5 percent to 20 percent.

The state is making progress, having launched OregonBuys as a pilot program for eProcurement in 2017. Ten state agencies participate so far. It won't be fully implemented until mid-2021. Secretary

of State Dennis Richardson, whose Audits Division performed the IT purchasing audit, and Republican legislators are outraged about the long timeline. Gov. Kate Brown and Democratic lawmakers should be, too.

Brown proposed some expansion of OregonBuys, but the state should move much faster. Investments in eProcurement will save money and potentially time.

There are all sorts of reasons to oppose centralized purchasing. It limits choice and reduces personal decision-making. Some jobs might become unnecessary. The technology of such a system is fallible. But so is the current decentralized approach. The audit report said, "purchase-level data is only available for approximately 12.5 percent of procurement expenditures."

The report also noted, "Without the ability to analyze detailed purchase data for all procurements, Oregon is unable to identify opportunities for potentially millions of dollars in cost savings." In contrast, states such as Georgia have achieved significant savings by tracking and analyzing such purchase contracts.

If the governor and Legislature truly are serious about saving money without harming services, as they should be, the audit report is a good place to start.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Seniors need affordable housing options too

While agreeing "affordable" housing is a genuine and ongoing problem in our area, one factor I never hear/see mentioned is the lack of affordable housing for senior citizens. Many seniors are living on their Social Security checks, and perhaps a small pension. But not enough to afford the high prices of most homes with high property taxes; apartments need first and last month's rent.

We currently have two 55-plus trailer parks, and two manufactured home parks in Warrenton. There are no vacancies. In the Astoria Mill Pond location, Gateway Phase 1 is ideal. However there is a 2-3 year waiting list. There may be assisted living homes available, but not all seniors require that service. Also, most cannot afford the high cost of these facilities.

With all the proposed building in our county, why can't 55-plus and older/disabled folks also have an opportunity to live in quiet and affordable living quarters? Are grandparents just being put out to pasture?
BERNADINE THOMAS
Warrenton

Newspapers are foundation of democracy

I went out the other morning to pick up The Oregonian off the sidewalk, and thought it wasn't there, and that only some flyer was in its place, because it was so tiny. But it was the newspaper.

We are all aware that our local newspapers are shrinking, and we fear that they will soon disappear altogether, as many newspapers across the nation have. Also, we watched family over the holidays staring at their phones and laptops, and accusing Granny of not being with the times. Well, I am with the times. These times are scary, as our press is denigrated by this administration.

Who is doing the investigative reporting? It is our newspapers. How many times have you noted CNN, or CBS, or other news outlets quote stories from the Washington Post or The New York Times? I am going to continue to support newspapers including, of course, The Daily Astorian. They are the foundation of our democracy.
JEAN HOOGE
Astoria

When's the next mayoral election?

While we're on the topics of collusion, complicity and conspiracy, it seems a little odd that a decision that's already been made is brought back again and

again, to the potential profit of a global corporation with very deep pockets.

Lo and behold, the new Astoria mayor publicly censures a board member for having an opinion contrary to aforementioned global corporation ("Design Review Committee member confronted by Astoria mayor over hotel comments," The Daily Astorian, Jan. 8).

As a show of magnanimity he refrains from firing her, merely "suggesting" she, in essence, shut up. Brave new world, indeed.

When's the next mayoral election? Can mayors be impeached?
JOHN RIDER
Ocean Park, Washington

Mayor showed poor judgment with committee member

In response to the article "Design Review Committee member confronted by Astoria Mayor over hotel comments," The Daily Astorian, Jan. 8):

As a veteran of the U.S. Navy submarine service, I've witnessed enough poor management and leadership of projects and people by senior officers to know that just because you served multiple years of service and attained a certain rank, does not automatically qualify you to be a good manager of people and projects.

Mayor Bruce Jones has shown clear lack of good leadership by pointing out

publicly that he believes his 30-plus years of experience as an officer in the Coast Guard gives him automatic qualification as a good manager and leader of people and projects over someone who is younger.

Ms. Sarah Jane Bardy has built her successful business through excellent project management and people skills in a very short time. All without benefit of leadership training, etc., which Mayor Jones has undergone numerous times during his 30-plus years of service within the Coast Guard.

Mayor Jones, in discounting Ms. Bardy's own experience, shows very poor judgment. Plus, what is the purpose of the Design Review Committee if the City Council will overturn its decision?
ANDREW FUHRMANN
Astoria

AAUW opposes proposed changes to Title IX

The Astoria branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), objects to changes to Title IX proposed by U.S. Department of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos regarding discrimination on the basis of gender in our educational institutions.

DeVos proposes regulations, in place of what are now guidelines, that will make it harder for victims of sexual harassment and assault to assert claims. It will pro-

vide additional protections for educational institutions that fail to adequately protect students.

The proposed definition of sexual harassment as "unwelcome conduct on the basis of sex that is so severe, pervasive and objectively offensive that it denies a person access to the school's education program or activity" is exceptionally limiting, in our opinion. There are many forms of sexual harassment that are damaging that do not meet this high standard. What does, "objectively offensive" and "pervasive" mean? Who decides if this standard is met? These are just some of our concerns.

AAUW of Oregon is a nonpartisan organization. This isn't about partisan politics. It's about the protection and well-being of middle-school, high-school, college and university students.

Astoria AAUW urges you to join us and our statewide organization in opposing proposed regulations regarding Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Docket ID ED-2018-OCR-0064.

Contact DeVos' office directly via the Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education. Contact Senators Ron Wyden, Jeff Merkley and Rep. Suzanne Bonamici today. Time is running out. Opportunity for public comment ends Jan. 31.

LIZ BARTELL
SARA MEYER
Astoria AAUW

