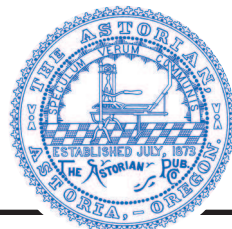


OPINION

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OUR VIEW

Why the sweetheart deal for HR director?

The Oregon Legislature's longtime human resources director was deservedly criticized for her handling of sexual harassment cases at the State Capitol. Yet Lore Christopher received a sweet deal for retiring at the end of 2018, including the opportunity to work from home at \$12,116 a month through this August.

Why? The Legislature's elected leaders have mostly been mum. This matters because their silence contradicts their professed commitment to improving the workplace culture around the Legislature, including transparency and accountability.

Christopher announced her retirement last October, writing in part, "I have committed to be here, on board, to manage a successful transition and to help guide the Employee Services team through August of 2019 to complete the pay equity implementation, reconsideration process and other ongoing critical projects during the on-boarding of the next human resources director."

At the time, her retirement seemed a natural occurrence despite the turmoil engulfing the Capitol. Only through the dogged reporting of EO Media Group's Claire Withycombe have Oregonians now learned that Christopher would be paid this year for working from home and that — in the "Retirement and Transition Agreement" she signed in September — she had waived any right to sue for age discrimination.



Keizertimes

Lore Christopher, the Legislature's HR director, stepped down in March to a temporary state job paying her \$12,000 a month. The former Keizer mayor is shown here in a screenshot from her 2014 exit interview with the Keizertimes newspaper.

The Legislature still has made no public announcement about Christopher's circumstances or whom to contact about sexual harassment issues until lawmakers establish their planned Equity Office, which would handle such complaints. Interim HR Director Jessica Knieling did notify legislators and staff on Thursday that two law firms had been retained "to handle any investigations into allegations of harassment or discrimination." (The lawyers are Sarah J. Ryan at Jackson Lewis P.C. and Brenda K. Baumgart at Stoel Rives. Both firms have Portland offices.)

Knieling took over the HR job on March 11, coming from the state Department of Administrative Services, where she was a top HR administrator. Legislators called her "a breath of fresh air" when

she met Wednesday with the Joint Committee on Capitol Culture.

The legislative committee is making solid progress on implementing the recommendations of the Oregon Law Commission, as required by the \$1.3 million settlement that House Speaker Tina Kotek and Senate President Peter Courtney recently signed with the state Bureau of Labor and Industries.

The settlement included this provision: "The offices of Legislative Counsel and Legislative Administration will have no role in handling investigations related to discrimination and sexual harassment." That declaration seems a tacit admission that legislative management, including the human resources office, lacked credibility and expertise. In hindsight, the blame rests not only on

the paid management but also on Kotek, Courtney and their predecessors, who failed to recognize or ignored the profound deficiencies in how the Legislature prevented, investigated and corrected sexual harassment.

The retirement agreement with Christopher appears to reflect that attitude. She was to retire as HR director on Dec. 31, 2018, or when her successor was named, whichever was later, in which case her title as of Jan. 2, would be "acting human resources director." Her last day working in the Employee Services Office was to be Dec. 31, or a mutually agreed date.

Once a new HR director was in place, Christopher was to work from home through August as an HR special projects coordinator and continue receiving her \$12,116 monthly salary, as well as such benefits as medical insurance and vacation.

Questions persist. If Christopher was good at her job, why this sweetheart deal? If she was not good at her job — as was alleged by some who said they endured sexual harassment — why this sweetheart deal?

It also is galling that legislative management made the nice retirement deal with the departing HR director in September at the same time the legislative leadership was fighting BOLI's investigation, claiming it was reckless and political.

Political? To some extent. Reckless? Definitely not. The proof lies in the \$1.3 million settlement.

GUEST COLUMN

Cherishing Mulinix's wisdom in life and photography

EDITOR'S NOTE: Maddie Dickerson Moore was photographed many times by local photojournalist Damian Mulinix, who died Saturday after suffering a stroke on March 18 at age 42. Maddie was mentored by Damian during her post-college internship at the Chinook Observer. We join with her in mourning the premature loss of a brilliant and caring young man.

I read a post from the Chinook Observer that said Damian "recorded a generation of life on the Long Beach Peninsula." That was my generation. I would bet there are few if any of my classmates who could say they were never caught on film by Damian.

From middle school and beyond he was there. At every band concert, every school play, every big game, he was there. He loved jazz and thus he could be seen at most Ilwaco High School jazz band concerts. But he never could have guessed that the piano player and the trumpet player he captured over and over again at countless concerts, parades, and pep band rallies would one day grow up, get married, become his peers, and become his friends.

In 2011 when I graduated from college, I landed back at home with my first big journalism internship, and my first-ever photo boss, Damian. The first few weeks were ... rough. I knew him, he knew me, but this was new territory. On my second day, he walked by, gingerly held up my camera strap that was dangling from the corner of my desk and said, "if I was a meaner person, I would have accidentally caught myself on this strap and your camera would have come crashing to the ground. Lesson number one: NEVER leave your camera strap hanging off a table."

D-man, as I called him, documented much of my life thus far. He photographed my toothy, adolescent smile in front of a Neptune Theater movie screen, with an image of an "Abby Normal" brain from "Young Frankenstein" to help publicize my senior project; I think this



Luke Whittaker/Chinook Observer

About 20 mourners gathered Saturday night at the Chinook Observer for an impromptu memorial for longtime photographer Damian Mulinix. His friend and student Madeline Moore is shown affixing a condolence note to the light pole — the notes were later gathered and sent to Mulinix's family.

is where I started to embed myself in a small corner of his heart. He photographed me behind a case full of pastries at my inaugural Ilwaco market day, when I opened my bakery. He photographed my husband, Jacob, beautifully welding steel, and helped launch the start of his small metalworking business. He photographed me and Jacob as we walked back up the aisle after saying "I do." And he photographed my daughter, just weeks old, lying sleepily on Jacob's chest.

Jacob and I were lucky enough to get to see Damian a few days before he passed from complications from a stroke. But I will not remember him in that hospital bed. I will remember the shimmer

in his eyes as we flipped through image after image that I'd taken on assignment that made me know that I'd "nailed it." I will remember how he called me "cowgirl" and "sis." I will remember the blank stare that clearly said I did NOT "nail it" as the pit in my stomach would form.

I will remember the Ilwaco High School football match where it rained the entire game as we stood on the sidelines, and then sitting back in the newsroom together as the night wore on, while he edited images and I wrote copy. I will remember the giant grin that would form when I would play Chopin's "Prelude in E Minor," something he asked for when-

ever I was cornered with a piano. I will remember the tears he held back, and his choked voice, when I saw him in the newsroom after photographing the near drowning of a young boy, the image of which would become one of the biggest of his career. And I will remember how he made me a better photographer — one tough, but true, critic after another.

Damian's photographs of me and my family will forever hang on my walls. I will play the records he left on my porch in a Sid's bag until they're worn through. Chopin's "Prelude in E Minor" will forever be his song. And I will never, ever leave my camera strap dangling from the corner of a table.