

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## OUR VIEW

# Oregon needs a state auditor

## Despite scandal over current auditor, Washington state's model holds up

What happens when the person responsible for rooting out waste and fraud in state and local governments may be a crook? Our neighbor to the north is about to find out.

Earlier this month, a federal grand jury indicted Washington's state auditor on 10 felony counts involving his private business practices. The indictment claims Troy Kelley devised schemes to defraud title companies and their borrowers of nearly \$3 million from 2006 to 2008. Kelley also is charged with failing to pay \$1 million in income taxes for those years by under-reporting his income.

The indictment does not accuse Kelley of criminal activity involving his duties as state auditor. However, Acting U.S.

Attorney Annette Hayes said Kelley "spun a web of lies" in a cover-up during his tenure as state auditor.

It's a stunning downfall for the state's top fiscal watchdog. *The News Tribune* of Tacoma describes the man:

"In the span of six years, Troy Kelley rose from political obscurity to statewide office, capturing a series of state House campaign victories on his way to winning election as Washington's auditor ... He projected a spit-polished image that sold well politically: a dedicated family man who served his country, a successful lawyer and businessman eager to lead ... Boosted by a sterling résumé, with stops at the Department of Justice and a Fortune 500 company."

Kelley, a Tacoma Democrat, pleaded not guilty to the charges and vowed to clear his name. And despite calls from Gov. Jay Inslee, political leaders of both parties and most Washington newspapers, the 50-year-old refuses to resign. And

that's where the intrigue begins.

Kelley said he intends to take a leave of absence starting May 4 to pursue his legal fight. He will not accept pay or benefits during the absence, something Gov. Inslee already said would not happen.

Washington Republicans have other concerns. They pointed out in a recent email that the deadline for candidates to file for a special election is May 11. That means if Kelley resigns after that date, Democrat Gov. Inslee would appoint the next state auditor. And that appointee would be in office until the next election in 2016, giving that person a serious headstart against a Republican challenger.

Washington's trails should not discourage Oregonians from pressing for an independently elected state auditor. Our current system of having the Secretary of State's office handle this critical responsibility is flawed.

Oregon is the only state where the secretary of state is responsible for auditing public spending. That office is also charged with overseeing elections, promoting business and maintaining state archives. With state and local governments in Oregon spending more than \$40 billion each year, the audit function should be separate and independent.

An elected state auditor would report directly to the citizens of Oregon and be charged with representing the sole interest of the public. Washington state has demonstrated this public benefit for more than a century.

Voters may select a bad apple like Troy Kelley. But voters, not career politicians, should determine the person best suited to restore that trust.

**Oregon is the only state where the secretary of state is responsible for public spending.**

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

**Editor's note:** Letters to the editor regarding issues on the May ballot must be received by the *East Oregonian* by 5 p.m. May 7 to ensure publication in our May 9 edition. Letters received after the deadline will be posted online but not in print. Email editor@eastoregonian.com to submit your letter or drop them off at our office, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. in Pendleton.



## OTHER VIEWS

# Love, marriage and music

At some point in my childhood, just before my teens, I was struck by the fact that almost all of the songs that I was hearing on the radio, half-consciously humming along to or committing to memory were about love.

Different shades of love, yes, and different stages of it: the heat and hunger of its infancy, the expansive warmth of its maturity, the bleeding pain when all that's left of it is shards. But love nonetheless.

Starland Vocal Band mulled the naughty pleasures of an "Afternoon Delight." Daryl Hall pined for the sweet validation of a sweetheart's gesture in "Sara Smile." "Don't Go Breaking My Heart," Elton John implored Kiki Dee, and back then he hadn't informed the world, or fully accepted, that the people most likely to hold that kind of power over him didn't have names like Kiki.

Those were all huge hits in 1976, which is when I turned 12. And the No. 1 single that year?

"Silly Love Songs," which Paul McCartney thought that "people would have had enough of." No way, because there's nothing silly about love, and when it comes to music, love is almost all there is.

When it comes to life, too.

On Tuesday love went to the Supreme Court, where the lawyers and the justices spoke of "equal participation" and "equal protection," of "due process" and "animus," of the Constitution and states' rights.

There were legal terms and points of reference aplenty. It's easy to become lost in them, and just as easy to follow the leads of journalists who are framing the proceedings as a high drama starring enigmatic actors: Justice Anthony Kennedy with his swing vote, Chief Justice John Roberts with his sensitivity to the court's legacy.

But it's important to step back and remember what this is really about: the most exquisite emotion that any of us can have, the most exalted bond, and whether we're content to tell one group of Americans that their love is less dignified — and less worthy of celebration — than another group's.

There's no alternate message for gays and lesbians to read into prohibitions against same-sex marriage, because our society, like so many others, decided long ago that marriage was the most formal recognition of love, the ultimate blessing bestowed on it.

For many years now the tireless, dauntless advocates who blazed the trail to Tuesday have eloquently detailed the practical reasons



FRANK BRUNI  
Comment

for legalizing same-sex marriage, the measurable rights that it establishes or ensures.

It eliminates anxieties and injustices regarding hospital visits, medical decisions, estates, Social Security benefits, child custody, child care, immigration and more. It's the best way to replace limbo with stability, freeing good people to get on with the rest of their lives.

But the expansion of marriage to include gays and lesbians does something even broader and deeper than that. It alters the very soundtrack of our existences, removing a refrain of disapproval, however minor, however muted.

I long detected that refrain in all of those silly love songs, which dominated the pop charts of my youth and dominate the pop charts now, because they traced a landscape that I would almost certainly have to tiptoe across, that was only partly hospitable to the likes of me.

So while they filled me with longing, as they were meant to, they also filled me with an unintended sadness. With envy, too, because I knew that for other people — straight people — worry and shame didn't intrude on the melodies.

So much has changed. One of the most widely played love songs of last year, "Stay With Me," is performed by Sam Smith, whose fans are fully aware that he's gay. They're aware, too, that the "one-night stand" that he mentions in the opening line is with another man.

At a music festival later this year, he's scheduled to appear with Elton John, now out of the closet, now knighted and now with kids and a husband, whom he married under British law, which allows it.

U.S. law remains a patchwork: equality in this state, inequality in that one. That's where the Supreme Court comes in.

It can endorse inconsistency. Or the justices can do what's right and what's necessary, acknowledging that there's no way to divorce a person's way of loving from his or her humanity — that they're entwined, like verse and chorus, and to treat one as inferior is to treat both that way.

We'll probably get a ruling in June. And with any luck, that judgment will turn all the love songs of yesterday, today and tomorrow into universal anthems that make the same promise to every listener, no matter the object of his or her affection.

Frank Bruni has been an Op-Ed columnist for *The New York Times* since June 2011.

## YOUR VIEWS

### BMCC bond will empower the region

Very soon we will find the 2015 May election ballot in our mailboxes.

This is our opportunity to voice our opinion for issues facing our local communities. In this ballot you will find the request for a new Blue Mountain Community College bond. We believe that investing in BMCC will bring a change in lives as well as in our communities. Ultimately, the BMCC bond is not about me, it's not about BMCC. It's about what our friends and neighbors need to empower their community to create positive change for the future.

Join us in voting yes for the Blue Mountain Community College bond.

Bryan and Lou Ann Wolfe  
Hermiston

### Region cannot afford BMCC's bond measure

Yes, Blue Mountain Community College is a major asset to our community of northeast Oregon. As I have told the BMCC president and BMCC board chair, our family has much to appreciate about BMCC. However, for this letter, we will only discuss the "affordability" of this levy.

Many of the taxpayers cannot afford this loan that the voters are being asked to take out for

their local college. At this point in Oregon history, taxes are a big deal.

The property tax on a \$120,000 valued local residence per year, in 2002, was about \$1,500. In 2008, it was about \$1,900. In 2011, it was about \$2,100. In 2014, it was about \$2,250.

With the federal increase in fees, fines, co-pays, taxes, and Oregon's new upcoming taxes and fees, what will 2015's property tax be competing with? We do not have a choice on these levies. We do have a choice on the BMCC levy/loan. By the way, what do you think the "carbon tax" will cost us directly and indirectly (in the cost of living)?

Recently, the *East Oregonian* newspaper published an article concerning United Way. It reported that United Way no longer generates enough volunteer donations from individuals and businesses to contribute to several nonprofit organizations in Pendleton. Nor do they generate enough income to contribute to other nonprofit organizations at the level they are used to getting from the United Way. One of those unfunded organizations will be the Pendleton Salvation Army meals program.

What about the lower end of the economic food chain? For those who recycle metal, they have noticed, over the last year, that a pickup truck load of metal scrap gets, on the average, less than one half what it did a year ago.

Yes, the BMCC levy supporters paint a "rosy" picture of why we should take out another loan for BMCC.

Well, right now, economically speaking, all is not "rosy."

Larry and Jean Nye  
Athena

### Don't forget about Pendleton school levy

I've been enjoying reading all the letters of support for the Blue Mountain Community College bond measure, but have grown concerned at the lack of letters regarding an equally important measure on the May ballot — the Pendleton School District's Local Option Levy.

In 2000, after experiencing several years of devastating budget cuts caused by Ballot Measure 5, Pendleton voters passed the first local option levy and have voted to renew it in both 2005 and 2010. The 5-year levy is due to expire once again.

The district receives approximately \$470,000/year from the levy (\$300,000 from property taxes and \$170,000 from matching state funds) and failure to renew it could result in painful cuts to important programs.

First, it is important to remember that this is not a new tax. It is simply renewing a tax that has been in place for 15 years. Second, unlike the school bond measure that passed in 2013, the levy funds are

used for programs and teachers, not structures. Third, because the lion's share of school funding comes from the state general fund, the local option levy is one of the few ways we can financially help our schools in a significant way.

While I no longer have children in school, I strongly support the local option levy and urge everyone to vote yes on the measure. Soon, there will be several new, modern school buildings in town (as well as major upgrades to existing ones).

Let's help make sure that our kids receive a comprehensive, 21st century education inside those buildings. Please join me in voting yes on Ballot Measure 30-105.

Elizabeth Scheeler  
Pendleton

### Plass impressive in enthusiasm and skills

Thirteen years ago, we met Susan Plass, the new grant writer for Blue Mountain Community College. She immediately impressed us with her enthusiasm for BMCC; her organizational skills and attention to detail. She worked at University of Oregon before she came to BMCC and has 26 years of experience in the world of higher education. She has a thorough understanding of funding and the financial and program side of an institution of higher education. Before she retired, Susan successfully

received grants for over \$9 million in her ten years at BMCC. We believe she made an enormous difference for our college.

I joined Altrusa about six years ago and again ran into Susan Plass as a member of the organization. I continue to be impressed with her friendliness at our club functions and her sense of purpose for whatever position she holds in the organization. After Susan retired from BMCC she became more active in Altrusa. An example of her organizational abilities:

For the past two years, I have served on an Altrusan committee chaired by Susan. Before each meeting we receive a detailed emailed agenda of what we will discuss. The agenda was built with input from our entire committee. On that agenda is an extremely detailed accounting of our funds and where and when they were dispersed and what the purpose was. The day after the meeting we receive the minutes to peruse and correct if necessary. Having this financial information before us assists us in forming, or not, funds for community projects.

We appreciate her dedication to education and know her knowledge and character will translate into becoming a BMCC board member who understands the world of higher education and she will be dedicated to doing the best job she can.

Dave and Viki Lange  
Pendleton