

# ODOT: Craig denied suggestions his relationship with ODOT would bias his review

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designs for the henhouse," said Portland economist Joe Cortright, a longtime critic of ODOT's management of projects.

Cortright said the choice gives the appearance state leaders are seeking a predetermined outcome to the performance audit. Craig has worked on ODOT projects in the past and could seek contracts in the future, Cortright noted.

Craig said he was unaware that the review is linked with passage of a transportation package. He also denied suggestions that his relationship with ODOT would bias his review.

"I think all of that enhances my ability to see what is good and bad and what needs to be improved," Craig said. "I think that is why they hired me. It has never occurred to me that somehow this would be connected to pursuing more work."

Craig has published articles praising ODOT's past work, bearing titles such as "Delivering Remarkable Results in a Changing

Marketplace: Oregon's State Bridge Delivery Program."

Susan Morgan, a member of the Oregon Transportation Commission, defended Craig as independent, and said she is confident that the oversight committee "will hold Mr. Craig's team to high standards leading to an independent review of ODOT."

"Given the short time frame to completion, a consultant who is somewhat familiar with the organizational structure of ODOT may be an opportunity," Morgan said.

While the Department of Administrative Services ultimately was responsible for issuing a request for proposals and choosing Craig to do the review, ODOT employees already had recruited potential consultants. Those employees also asked several firms to give input on what the review should include, according to previous reports by the Pamplin Media Group/EO Media Group Capital Bureau.

Only two companies bid for the project: Craig's firm and Pennsylvania-based Public Works.

DAS formed a procurement team of three of its employees to score the proposals based on the quality of the executive summary, the firm's experience and approach to the audit, the consultants' resumes and pricing. Barry Pack, former chief administrative officer of DAS whom Brown recently named interim director of the Oregon Lottery, made the final call on the selection, said DAS spokesman Matt Shelby. Pack also served as a longtime aide to Brown when she was secretary of state.

Brown's office reiterated that she has entrusted the oversight committee and DAS to select an "experienced, independent consulting firm."

"This review will contribute to a stronger and better ODOT to serve the people of Oregon," said Bryan Hockaday, Brown's press secretary.

Craig's proposal scored 10 points higher than Public Works' in all areas except for price. Public Works bid \$246,600, while Craig offered to do the work for \$350,000.

Craig directed the Nebraska Department of Transportation for 10 years before becoming a

consultant. Since then, he has done management reviews of "best practices" for programs administered by departments of transportation in Missouri, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska and Washington states, according to his proposal. Public Works also has evaluated several departments of transportation, including those in Louisiana, West Virginia, Iowa, Colorado and New Mexico.

The request for proposal "clearly stated that we wanted someone with prior experience working with departments of transportation," Shelby said. "John has worked with ODOT and other states. We see this as a benefit."

Stakeholders expressed concerns back in January about whether an ODOT audit overseen by transportation officials could be impartial.

Several advocates with environmental and alternative transportation groups in a Jan. 6 letter asked Brown to hand over oversight of the audit to the Secretary of State's Office. That office already conducts performance audits for other state agencies.

"To ensure a rigorous and

unbiased review, the audit must be truly independent," the letter stated. "With all due respect to the Oregon Transportation Commission, we believe the audit will be perceived as in-house if it is overseen by the Oregon Transportation Commission and if ODOT staff is engaged in scoping the audit and in hiring the consulting firm that performs the audit. An audit overseen by the Secretary of State would alleviate concerns about bias."

The state's choice of Craig to do the review deepened those concerns, said Chris Hagerbaumer, deputy director of the Oregon Environmental Council, who signed the letter.

"The more in-house the audit is, the less the people will trust that it is actually impartial, and what is the purpose of an audit that people don't see as being impartial? It isn't going to actually serve the state well," Hagerbaumer said.

Pamplin Media Group reporter Nick Budnick contributed to this report.



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