

ANDREW CUTLER  
Publisher/Editor

KATHRYN B. BROWN  
Owner

ERICK PETERSON  
Hermiston Editor/Senior Reporter

THURSDAY, JANUARY 6, 2022

Founded October 16, 1875

A4

## OUR VIEW

# Oregon agencies skip audits the law requires

Oregon's latest "Annual Report of State-wide Internal Audit Activities" might be a perfect sleep aid. But that annual report is a really good idea.

That is, it's a really good idea if it's done right.

Big state agencies in Oregon are basically required by law to take a hard, objective look at themselves every year and figure out what they might need to do better. It could lead to improvement in government. And the audits improve transparency. They give Oregonians a window into how government agencies are doing.

This year the executive summary of the report is packed with good news. Agencies completed 56 audits. Three agencies got top marks from "external quality reviews." Fully 21 of the state internal auditors hold advanced degrees. And the highlight reel goes on with more.

Read just that executive summary and it seems like it's going great. Dig deeper, though, and the state actually only met one of its goals for internal audits. Some agencies didn't even do them. There are, of course, excuses for not doing them. There always are.

One goal is that 100% of state agencies comply with ORS 184.360. That's the state law that requires internal audits. The state didn't hit it.

Only 79% of the required agencies produced a risk assessment of the agency that conforms to national standards.

Only 72% completed at least one audit per year based on its annual report.

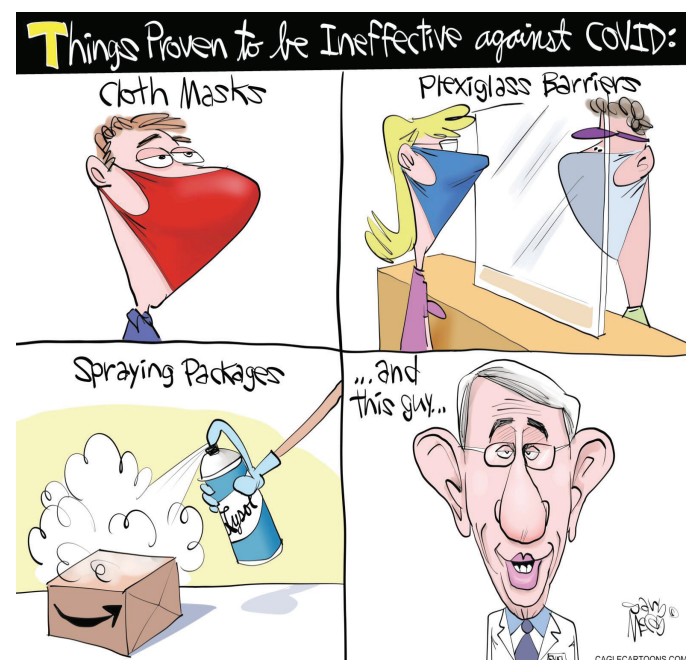
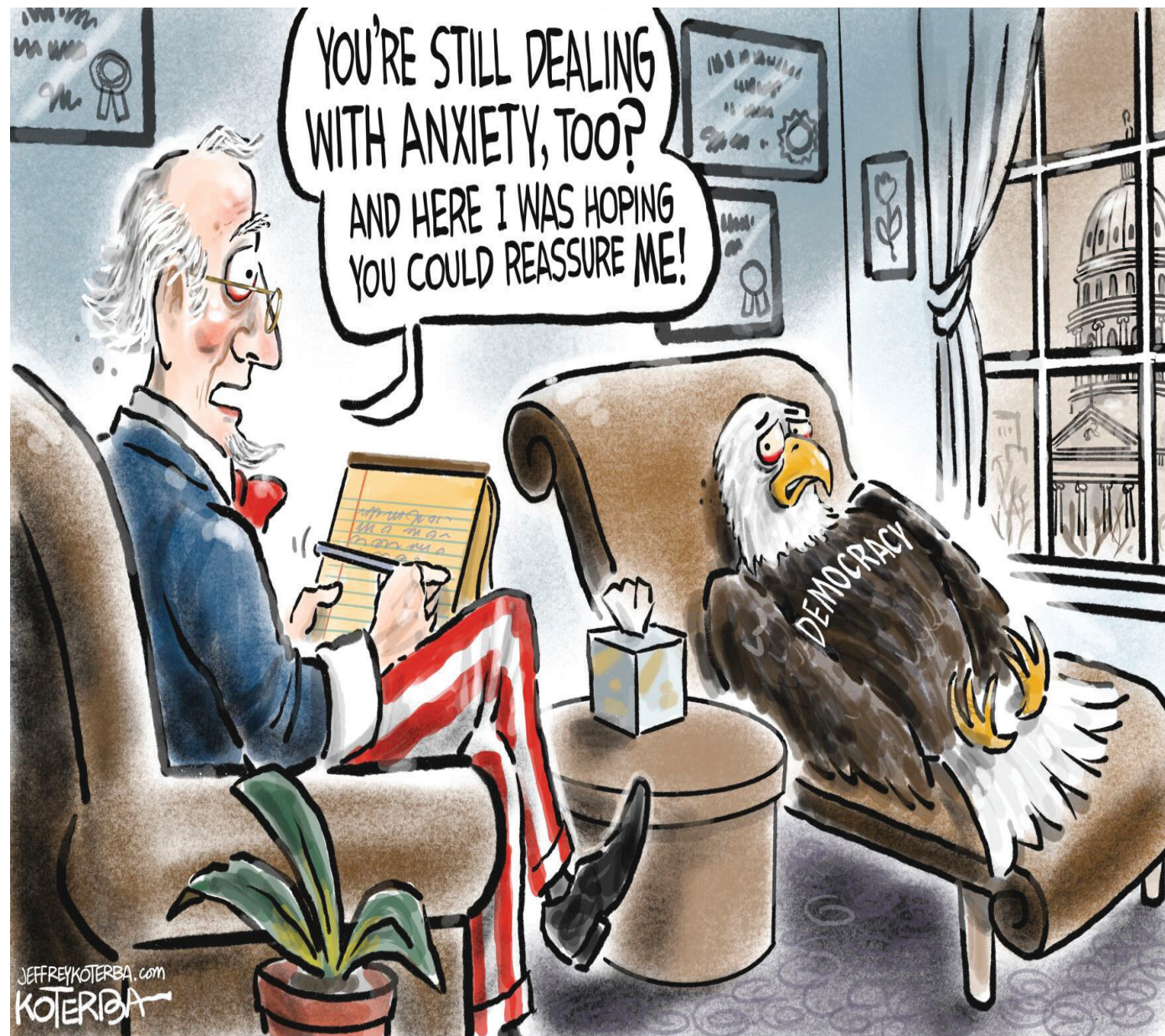
Only 69% completed a governance or risk management audit in the last five years.

The state also aims for a goal that 75% of state agencies complete an annual audit plan each year. Only 55% of agencies did.

The state's final two goals for internal audits have to do with using audits to improve government. One is that agencies do surveys after an audit to figure out ways to improve how they do audits. Only 83% did.

We had to chuckle when we saw the one goal that the state achieved. It's related to that last goal of conducting surveys after an audit. The state hopes at least 90% of survey responses affirmatively state the audit provided value to the organization. Fully 100% believed the audit work had value — now if only more agencies would actually do the audits as required.

If this report is to be truly useful, shouldn't the executive summary highlight that actually, year after year, many state agencies don't get these audits done? Shouldn't there be a brief summary about what each internal audit did find?



## A sense of place in the Blue Mountains



**BILL ANEY**  
THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

There is a place along the upper Grande Ronde River that has a hold on my heart. As a kid, I would camp there with my grandfather, him teaching me to build a fire, split kindling, play gin rummy, flip pancakes ("belly gaskets" he would call them) and fish for trout. Imagine the patience it must take to teach a 10-year-old how to cast a fly.

I was a city kid, raised in Portland and Corvallis, but every summer I would spend several weeks with my grandparents in Northeastern Oregon. I see now that these experiences and places led to me to make life choices that have always brought me back to the Blue Mountains. My education, summer jobs and career moves kept returning me to this place that feels like home.

In an incredible stroke of luck, one of my first Forest Service jobs was as a fire prevention technician, patrolling an area that included the upper Grande Ronde. A campground had been developed where grandpa used to park his trailer, the lodgepole pine forest had been ravaged by pine beetles, and eventually the river was no longer stocked with native hatchery trout, but I still felt a great attachment to this landscape.

Each day I visited with campers, fishers and woodcutters and shared with them stories of my summers in the same spot, pointing out good fishing holes, access roads and spring sources — and of course, spreading the fire prevention message.

Social scientists have a term for this special feeling I have for the upper

Grande Ronde. It is called "sense of place" and refers to the characteristics of a place that make it special or unique or that create in people a sense of attachment and belonging. My childhood experiences created for me a primal landscape, and it is common for exposure to natural landscapes to influence our preferences later in life. That certainly held true for me.

Have you ever driven by a house where you lived as a kid and felt a rush of memories, sights and sounds? That's sense of place. Do you choose to camp in the same location every hunting season, perhaps your grandparents' hunting campsite, even when the hunting success doesn't live up to the memories of your youth? That tug is your sense of place, and it's important. During my career I was sometimes frustrated by my agencies' inability to close roads, even when the roads were reducing the value of wildlife habitat or damaging soil and water quality. It seemed like every two-track road in the forest led to someone's traditional family hunting camp.

Some elements of the sense of place are cultural, referring to the attachment of a people or culture to an environment or homeland. I don't compare my own feelings of sense of place with the connections that Native people have to their ancestral lands, as my connection only runs one or two generations deep and doesn't include the land providing for the needs of my ancestors — nor was it ever taken from them. But I do respect that Native people have a long and spiritual connection to the land, and I appreciate the significance of their work to restore the capacity of the land and waters to provide for them. It must be a powerful emotional experience to see salmon return to a stream that one's ancestors used to fish, or to pick huckle-

berries in areas known through family oral history.

We spend plenty of time in inauthentic locations, places that could be put anywhere. Strip malls, fast food restaurants, large box stores and downtown areas that have been converted to tourist traps or heavy commercial use all lose their ability to connect to people with a sense of place. Gertrude Stein visited the site where her childhood home and farm once stood, and upon seeing that the land had been converted to housing developments, summarized her feelings by saying "there is no there there." This certainly is the antithesis of the sense of place; I sense in her writing a mourning for the loss of part of her own identity.

To be sure, the upper Grande Ronde is not the only place that evokes strong feelings for me. There is a lake in the Willows I call "spread your ashes worthy" because of its sheer beauty. Hayward Field in Eugene is a place that holds special memories for me as a track and field athlete, coach and spectator. Even the sidewalk in front of the Great Pacific has a special place in my heart because of the many summer Friday evenings I have spent there with good friends.

As an adult, I have visited and fished the upper Grande Ronde with my own family. The day is coming soon when I will be able to take my grandfather to the same place, and I look forward to setting up a camp, cooking belly gaskets, building a campfire, playing in the river, and helping them catch trout on a fly.

I suspect these experiences will bring a tear or two to my eye; such is the power of sense of place.

Bill Aney is a forester and wildlife biologist living in Pendleton and loving the Blue Mountains.

### EDITORIALS

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

### LETTERS

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published.

### SEND LETTERS TO:

editor@eastoregonian.com,  
or via mail to Andrew Cutler,  
211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801