

Fox agrees one person shouldn't be treasurer and finance director

The World has a [story about the most recent candidate for treasurer](#), Heather Fox. She sounds like a reasonable candidate and she answers some questions [raised previously](#), such as will she collect two salaries and is she just running as a spoiler to help Megan Simms oust Matt Rowe. The answer would appear to be no and no. According to the paper Fox is aware she will not keep her current job of tax specialist and may take a pay cut if she wins. More importantly, she agrees with many of us that no one person should be both finance director/administrator AND treasurer.

Megan Simms just got promoted to finance director and I don't think she should have those responsibilities even though Mary Barton has been doing that forever.

Amen!

She appears to offer a reasonable alternative to those who find Rowe unpalatable but are appalled at the commission power grab their reprehensible election manipulation to keep Rowe out that Simms seems to represent. [Go Heather!](#)

By the way, the board is holding a work session tomorrow at 1:30 in the commissioner's courtroom to discuss the positions of finance director and human resources.

Here's what's wrong with the BOC's latest treasurer scheme

Commissioner John Sweet bristles whenever anyone dares to note the similarities between the newly created position of [finance director](#) and a [county administrator](#). The latter, as everyone will remember, was brought before the voters in 2012 asking whether the county should transition to an administrator model of government and soundly defeated. Nevertheless, the local oligarchy that have funded the campaigns of Sweet and Commissioner Melissa Cribbins really pushed hard to centralize control of the county through an administrator. Empowering a finance director with many of the same duties, including hiring and firing authority across departments, is a slick way of getting the job done, hopefully without anyone noticing.

This isn't their [first attempt to pull this off](#) but this time with Commissioner Bob Main in full support and cooperation they have actually succeeded and have filled the position in house, hiring [deputy treasurer Megan Simms](#). Treasurer Mary Barton had assumed extra duties above and beyond the [state mandated responsibilities](#) of a treasurer over her sixteen years in office. Ironically, this began when tight finances forced the county to do away with a finance adviser already operating under the treasurer's office years ago. The new finance director, is an at will position this time answerable only to the commissioners not the treasurer who will be assuming those duties and has also been given additional authority akin to an administrator. For example, Barton can not overrun other department heads on staffing matters, the new finance director can.

Mission accomplished. Only a few board approved tweaks to the job description and the commission [will have itself an administrator](#). The next problem for the commission is to make the position as cost neutral as possible for the cash strapped

county. After all the big sales pitch for an administrator has always been that the move would magically save the county "millions." Simms' new salary as director of finance already pays \$6,000 per year more than Barton receives who will retire at the end of this year. A partial solution the board found is to declare the office of treasurer a 'part time' position and reduce the salary by half. The concept of a part time elected official is bizarre at best as an elected office is really about accepting responsibility and being answerable to the electorate and not a function of time. As a taxpayer I am paying the treasurer to make sure everything runs the way it is supposed to and to provide the checks and balances necessary to protect the people's money. If the treasurer is willing to take on the responsibility and potential liability of that position and they can manage it in just a few hours a month, great! How often do you find County Clerk Terri Turi in the office, for example? Yet the clerk's office always serves my needs when I go in and it is the elected clerk's signature that certifies any documents. We are paying for a service that has an important public value, how much time it takes to accomplish that is irrelevant. For that matter, how often do you find the commissioners in the office?

This concept of a part time elected position is fueled by Barton herself as she is claiming her mandated duties only take up 10% of her time. For a list of the fiduciary responsibilities we are paying someone to accept and undertake look [here](#). Referring to any compensated elected office as "part time" conjures images of the officeholder picking and choosing which duties to uphold or ignore each month.

Now we get to the treasurer's race. So let's be blunt. Candidate for treasurer, Matt Rowe's bombastic hyperbolic speech combined with his cartoon radio voice makes him come across almost like a caricature of a politician. For me, at least, this sometimes has the effect of making it hard to take him seriously. Consequently, I can understand why the

commissioners might find it unpalatable to work with him on a regular basis. Then there is Main's ongoing "feud" with Rowe.. Still, this is the people's choice, or it is supposed to be, so they will just have deal with Rowe if he is elected. Or not. Almost immediately after being appointed finance director, Simms filed her [candidacy for treasurer](#) receiving endorsements from both Main and Cribbins. She had been rumored to be considering a run for several months but the timing has led many to believe this is an elaborate scheme to keep Rowe from office.

At the request of the commissioners the [compensation committee met](#) last week to reduce the treasurer's salary. If Simm's wins she will presumably work 110% time adding the 10% treasurer's duties to her full time job as finance director. Ten percent of her time she will be answerable to the people and the rest of the time, 100% of the time by the commission's own reckoning, she answers to the board as an at will employee controlling the bulk of her salary. Based on [The World story](#) Simm's already appears pretty deferential but if she is elected I would prefer the treasurer position to be fully paid so that her deference was to the people and receive a stipend as finance director, not the other way around. In 2013 at a regular commission meeting discussing the need for a finance director Barton explained that during a regular state audit the county was advised that having one person performing all the functions Barton performs was not healthy should anything happen to that one person.

Main has been manipulating county offices for some time with ill effect beginning with Assessor Adam Colby. Once close, Main and Colby fell out and eventually Colby was recalled from office to be replaced by yet another Main pick, Steve Jansen. When two commissioners passed away within months of each other Main ignored an obvious choice as a replacement, Larry Van Elsberg who had garnered 14,000 votes against the late Nikki Whitty. Instead, Main [maneuvered the appointments](#) of interim

commissioners Cam Parry and Fred Messerle to disastrous effect. Both turned on him and Messerle even ran against Main losing by only 14 votes. Main clearly doesn't trust the electorate to make good choices but there is also no reason the electorate should trust in Main's judgement given his choices have brought an enormous amount of turmoil to the county.

During the Fred and Cam era the structure advisory committee went around the county encouraging switching the county to a volunteer board of commissioners to offset the cost of a paid administrator. Committee member Bill Grile attended rotary clubs and other service clubs pitching this meme. Already Simms looks to have taken a couple of chores away from the commissioners so maybe they should be looking to cut their own salaries. Also, what's to stop them from declaring the assessor, surveyor and clerk as part time positions and cutting those salaries?

The BOC is "hiring" a

treasurer, or so it appears

It's no secret that the Coos County Board of Commissioners is no fan of Matt Rowe. Rowe was, until last Thursday, running unopposed for the county treasurer's position on a what he calls a transparency platform. Last week, Megan Simms, the newly hired finance director/de facto administrator filed for the position. The term "de facto administrator" refers to the job description which allows the finance director to have [authority over personnel in other departments](#) overriding department heads.

Hires, trains, develops and appraises staff effectively. Takes corrective action, up to and including termination, as necessary, on a timely basis and in accordance with County Policy and/or Collective Bargaining agreements. Employees supervised work in the Finance and Tax Collection department, consisting of accounting, and tax collection, as well as employees working in finance and accounting positions within other county departments.

The finance director has been hired at \$5K per month and answers to the commission and centralizes control over the county administrative function, a move the voters soundly disapproved at the polls in 2012. The finance director also takes over several functions formerly managed by the Treasurer Mary Barton but that were above and beyond the state mandated requirements for her elected position. As an elected position the treasurer answer to the voters but the finance director answers only to the commission so if one person holds both jobs (and presumably the salaries to go with them), it appears to present a glaring conflict of interest. The BOC are meeting tomorrow to discuss lowering the pay of the treasurers office to partially offset the cost of hiring the finance director. If the same person holds the elected position as well as a higher paying at will position governed by the board it seems

there may be a lot of room for inappropriate influence from the BOC over the duties of the treasurer.

This post will be updated.

The compensation committee met with the board of commissioners today to discuss the proposed salary for a “part time” treasurer. The meeting was curious in that John Sweet chaired the meeting instead of letting the committee members run their own meeting but in the end the group settled on a proposed salary of \$28,000 per year beginning January 1, 2017.

Coos County needs tax equity

“If you’re in trouble, or hurt or need – go to the poor people. They’re the only ones that’ll help – the only ones.” Ma Joad spoke those words in John Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath* after someone of equally modest means gave her a dime’s worth of sugar. This sentiment, unfortunately is clearly demonstrated in our local leaders’ approach to solving our fiscal crisis. The same time they offer corporate welfare to companies like Veresen they discuss cutting services and attempt to add taxes on lodging or marijuana. In fact, this approach is a national epidemic as evidenced by the recent statistics showing that just [3% of America’s families own 54% of the wealth](#). Thirty years ago the lower 90% wage earners owned 36% of the wealth, today that number is 22%.

No one wants to see waste no matter how well funded our government services are but when politicians like Matt Rowe talk about trimming “administrative redundancies” what they are really doing is the equivalent of going to Ma Joad’s poor

people. Each year our property taxes increase by 3% and each year our leaders talk about or implement reductions in services so that we pay more for less. Coos County is microcosm of what is happening across the country because our elected leaders don't have the stones to go after the real cause of our fiscal crisis, inequitable taxation.

As of 2013, according to the Coos County Assessor, 608,363 acres or 66% of the 920,350 acres of taxable land in Coos County fall under the classification of large tract forestland and 490,639 acres are specially assessed at just \$390 per acre. Regardless of how many trees are on the property or what stage of harvest they are almost half the county pays less than \$4 per acre and thanks to Salem the companies that own this land no longer are required to pay a severance tax to fund county services when they harvest. Salem has legislated the county into poverty.

Last year Weyerhaeuser merged with Plum Creek absorbing 6.2 million acres in an \$8.5 billion deal. A simple calculation estimates the average value of land in this merger at closer to \$1,400 per acre or a potential of another \$4.9 million in tax revenue, more than twice the present shortfall, for Coos County. [The Seattle Times reports](#) that "[Weyerhaeuser has transformed](#) its model from a vertically integrated conglomerate to a real-estate investment trust that focuses mainly on selling timber." The article goes on to explain that the company has "very important" customers in Asia for exported logs.

Real estate investment trusts pay no income taxes and instead pass profits to shareholders in the form of dividends. Weyerhaeuser maximizes the profits to its shareholders in part

by benefitting from corporate welfare like reduced property taxes due to special assessments and they don't even pay a severance tax. Put another way, those logs we see stacked along the water in North Bend and Coos Bay awaiting shipment to Asia represent 30 years of free taxes. That's a lot of sugar.

Even The World trumpeted the forty odd jobs those logs represent but consider the \$5 million annual cost to the taxpayer. Consider the lost millworker jobs on top of that as those logs sail out to sea. Consider whether Coos County can afford to be a tree farm for Wall Street speculators and why we would want to subsidize their operation to make foreign shareholders richer while we get poorer. Most importantly we should be asking how long can the county sustain this level of corporate largesse with so little return on investment.

Without tax equity Coos County will eventually find itself with public safety taken over by the State and surviving with the minimum services. We should also be asking our local officials and Representatives Caddy McKeown and Wayne Krieger and Senators Arnie Roblan and Jeff Kruse what they are doing at the legislative level to make Coos County sustainable. If the answer is nothing or if they try to rationalize the status quo they need to go because decades of following this path have proven not to benefit anyone but the local oligarchy and the timber industry that funds their campaigns.

Nor can we leave it up to our elected officials to solve these problems. It is so important to reopen the Sustainable Design Assessment Team Report and start having these serious conversations. I'm sure in if you are.

Coquille unanimously votes to tax marijuana

The City of Coquille voted to impose a 5% tax on medical marijuana and 10% on recreational marijuana sold within the city limits if and when the State legalizes marijuana dispensaries. Measure 91 legalizes the use and tightly regulated sale of marijuana to adults 21 and over if it passes in November. The city tax is purportedly to cover any costs incurred by the city should such a business locate and require additional policing, etc. Councilor Loren Wiese noted that the local pharmacy has never been burgled and doubts the dispensary would fare any worse but Mayor Matt Rowe and other council members are anticipating an increase in drug related police activity justifying the tax. The tax "will bring in more money for the city" and go direct to the general fund, according to Rowe. Unfortunately, no other local businesses or services are taxed by the city this way it may well be declared discriminatory. If the funds collected are in excess of the costs of allowing this new type of business then the city would be profiting and targeting one industry potentially opening up the city for a legal challenge.

Theoretically, it would seem that keeping the tax low would be to the benefit of the city as people might travel to Coquille to buy a safe, quality product for less than they pay elsewhere. Think how Californians and Washingtonians travel to Oregon to shop in order to avoid sales tax. Conversely, if the tax is set too high, the existing illegal pipelines for cannabis may continue to thrive.

Gurney inches ahead of Sweet, Looks to November runoff

The good news is that Don Gurney stopped John Sweet from taking an easy primary win. As of 9:30PM Sweet received only 3,994 votes or 41.66% of the vote but needed 51% to win reelection. Gurney, who ran a last minute campaign in opposition to the privatization of public money has 4,004 vote or 41.76%. Dale Pennie acted as the spoiler with almost 11.63% of the vote.

Melissa Cribbins survived her challengers to win reelection with 53% of the votes cast. Challenger Matt Rowe received 38%.

So the Yahoos didn't do too badly tonight but we have our work cut out for us if we want a change in November.

Matt Rowe for County Commissioner

By Shawn Jennings

Matt Rowe is running against Melissa Cribbins, the incumbent Commissioner.

The Crucial issue in this election is how we shall be governed. Will it be by a government we elect that is fully subject to all public records and meeting laws and is accountable to us through recall initiative and referendum or

shall be governed by a shadow government?

The shadow government is under construction and Melissa Cribbins is helping to build it. Its architects are planning to divert 75% of the Jordan Cove Community Service Fees to two private corporations. Between then these private corporations will eventually receive over \$20,000,000 yearly.

These fees are payments in lieu of taxes; however the architects of the shadow government claim these fees are not public dollars. Many leaders tell us the Community Enhancement Plan is "the chance of a lifetime". Don't believe it! The leaders peddling this snake oil are like beasts in rut – they smell the Jordan Cove money and they will do anything to get it.

Melissa Cribbins and her cohort John Sweet are part of this pack. They have repeatedly used their positions as Commissioners to help build the shadow government and they will continue to do so unless removed from office.

Matt Rowe is the hard working competent Mayor of Coquille. I have always found him accessible and willing to talk about any concern I have. He is endorsed by former County Commissioner Bev Owen. Bev was an excellent Commissioner and is one of the most ethical people I know. Matt is also endorsed by former Sheriff Mike Cook.

If elected Matt will vote to repeal the pay increase the Commissioners gave themselves last year. Matt opposes a tax break for Jordan Cove because he believes they "should pay their taxes like everybody else."

A vote for anyone else but Matt is a vote for Melissa Cribbins and the shadow government.

Please join me in voting for Matt Rowe and the future of our County!

Coquille school bus driver files for commissioner

Commissioner Melissa Cribbins has some competition for the number three commission seat. Coquille resident Matt Rowe filed Friday to take a run at her in the upcoming May election which means he will have barely two months to present himself to the voters. The politically ambitious Rowe hasn't even finished his first term as Coquille's mayor and has been putting out feelers for months and was rumored to be considering a run for state representative. When incumbent Wayne Krieger decided not to retire, Rowe evidently decided to switch his attention to the county commission.



stacks of week old papers thrown in shared dumpster at Rowe's apartment

In addition to working for the school district as a school bus driver, Rowe also distributes papers for The Sentinel. According to his neighbors, however, all too many copies of The Sentinel wind up in the communal dumpster. May we ascertain that Rowe is just too busy for recycling? Considering her formal educational background, Cribbins performance as a commissioner has been underwhelming, in my opinion. Rowe, however, would not be an improvement and lacks the maturity necessary for any job requiring critical thinking and cool deliberation. Nevertheless, I am looking forward to the first debates or public forums, they should be pretty entertaining.