

editorial

Vote-by-mail causes too many problems

Voter turnout in recent presidential and gubernatorial elections is way down from the levels of only 20 years ago. Many voters are disgusted with the alternatives offered by the major political parties, while others are just too lazy to go to the polls. As the result, many supporters of vote-by-mail see the mailed ballot as the savior of our electoral system.

The concept behind vote-by-mail is quite simple. Rather than voting at the polls, voters would receive their ballots through the mail, allowing them to vote at home. Oregon has experimented with vote-by-mail since 1981, when the state Legislature passed a bill calling for its limited use in local, county and special-district elections. Vote-by-mail proponents say figures that show an upswing in voter participation with the mailed ballot's use demonstrate its desirability as a tool for increasing electoral participation. While it may increase the quantity of voter participation, there are some serious questions about the quality of voter participation in vote-by-mail elections.

The concept of one person, one vote is key to the American electoral system. But in many households where a husband, wife or child dominates the other voting-age members of the household, the one person, one vote concept would be in serious jeopardy. Who will guarantee that a domineering husband will not fill out his ballot as well as his wife? Who will guarantee that a son or daughter voting in his or her first election will have the right to cast his or her ballot free of parental harassment? Who will guarantee any individual's right to a secret ballot?

Vote-by-mail also diminishes the sanctity of the voting process. Voting in any election should not be as easy as entering the Readers' Digest Sweepstakes. The act of voting is the ultimate legitimization of the American political system. Sitting at the kitchen table and voting for a county commissioner is much different than going to the polls, entering the voting booth and casting a ballot. While the mailed ballot may informalize the process, this informality may weaken the respect many have for the process.

What is to guarantee that voters will receive their mailed ballots in time to participate in the election? How will voters know whether the local board of elections actually received and counted their ballots? Who will guarantee that a candidate or his or her surrogates will not illegally electioneer as voters are casting their ballots?

State Rep. Tom Mason, D-Portland, supports legislation that would make vote-by-mail a part of Oregon law. His bill, House Bill 2280, would give county clerks the right to implement vote-by-mail in county, city and special-district elections, whenever the clerk determines its implementation would save money at the local level. The bill is undergoing hearings in the House State and Federal Affairs Committee.

While vote-by-mail elections may often be cheaper than traditional elections, the vote-by-mail process leaves much to be desired. The mailed ballot may temporarily increase voter participation. Yet, recent decreases in voter participation go much deeper than the voters' dissatisfaction for going to the polls. Many are frustrated with the nature of the system, not just the balloting process.

As the novelty of vote-by-mail wears off, many will discard their ballots as easily as they do most junk mail. Supporters of the mailed ballot should reconsider their support for HB 2280 and ask whether the social costs of vote-by-mail actually outweigh the financial savings.



THIS IS THE RIGHT-WING CBS EVENING NEWS, JESSE HELMS REPORTING. BIASED NEWS-CASTER, DAN RATHER WAS BURNED AS A COMMIE WITCH TODAY. IN OTHER GOOD NEWS...

letters

Quite upset

I would like to bring to the attention of the general public the comment made by Ka-Yin Siew that appeared on the ASUO profile "Eleven candidates vie for six IFC positions" (ODE, April 15). Siew said that his experience with violence and racial tension in Malaysia had helped him shape an attitude against discrimination. I wonder what exactly was meant by such a statement.

Siew went to school in Singapore and I hope that he made regular trips home to Malaysia to justify his claim of violence and racial tension there. In all my 25 years in Malaysia, I don't remember a single incident of violence except the one of May 13, 1969 (if referring to racist incidents; the government forces are still fighting the communist threats along the border with Thailand). Even that incident couldn't have amounted to a few days of violence in South Africa, forgive me for involving another country to show this comparison.

Anyway, such things are in the past, which most Malaysians try to bury with a new attitude of racial harmony. We are only about 20 years away from that and there may still be subtle racial tension as in many multi-racial countries, even those in the "more civilized West." I hope Siew will use his memory of the violence of two decades ago in a positive way. I am sure Siew was in no way trying to distort the situation in

Malaysia, but I thought it would be wise to clarify his position since a few people have been misled and some were even quite upset by it.

Siti Mohd Nor
Fellow Malaysian

Shame shame

Cheers to Lynn Pinckney for the victory in the ASUO elections but shame, shame on the Emerald for slipping the word "celebrates" into the caption of the Friday front page photo. Judging by Ms. Pinckney's expression in this pic, it hardly seems as if she and her friends are celebrating anything at all. Perhaps it would have been more appropriate for the caption to read something more along the lines of, "President-elect Lynn Pinckney ponders her solid victory..." or "President-elect Lynn Pinckney ruminates upon her solid victory..."

The word "celebrate" describes an atmosphere of gaiety and festive merriment where people wear hats and silly costumes, there are colorful banners and tablecloths adorning places like the Native Sons Hall, and people eat baked goods and barbecued things. Sometimes there are clowns that are hired to entertain the children and there is dancing and much laughter and confetti and mirth and pageantry. I don't think that I'm speaking just for myself when I say that it would be tough to hold up that photo of Lynn Pinckney and her friends Mary Kay and Charles to the big brown and syrupy eyes of some innocent yet eager young kid and say, "Hey, look! It's a celebration!" Anyway, it's just something to think about.

Geoff Ellsworth
Romance Languages

Some points

I would like to take this opportunity to underscore some points made in your April 4th article by Diana Elliott regarding the millrace ducks and geese.

The migration of wild fowl and the overbreeding of the birds at the Millrace contribute to the overpopulation of the area.

Springtime mating rituals are forcing outnumbered female birds into the street to escape their ardent male suitors.

If dumping/abandonment, breeding, and migration could be controlled, the quality of life at the Millrace would be greatly enhanced.

Food is being provided to the birds through the efforts of the Friends of the Millrace Ducks and Geese. Donations to that group for the purchase of food would be greatly appreciated.

Qualified adopters for ducks and geese should contact the Friends for possible placement.

Persons concerned about the welfare of the Millrace flock are welcome to become active volunteers and join in the responsible and preventative efforts of the Friends of the Millrace Ducks and Geese.

Joan Walker
Program Manager
Lane County
Animal Regulation

Seminar

In August of 1985, three U.S. senators will teach a two-week Comparative Public Policy seminar at the University of London in England.

I will be donating my time to this effort as will Sen. Thomas Eagleton, D-Mo., and Sen. Donald Riegle, D-Mich., who will teach the seminar along with Professor Kevin Gottlieb of Michigan State University.

Guest speakers from the British public sector will also present lectures in the seminar to provide the comparative perspective.

For decades, I have had a keen interest in both higher education and the legislative process. This political science seminar will be an opportunity for the pursuit of both interests.

The course should be as enjoyable as it is informative.

Oregon State University and Michigan State University are cooperating to offer this seminar to the students of both institutions.

Students who are interested in participating can do so by contacting the Office of International Education at OSU.

Mark Hatfield
U.S. Senator

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