

Mail-in senatorial vote won't increase turnout

■ **OUR OPINION:** Oregon's mail-in election won't turn out informed voters

"Hello, Mr. Jones?"
 "Uh, yes, this is John Jones. Who's th —"
 "Mr. Jones, this is Rick Roodman with the GOBA Vee '95 committee and I'm calling to see if you —"
 "Wait a minute; wait a minute. Just what the heck is the GOBA Vee '95 committee?"
 "Well, Mr. Jones, 'GOBA Vee' means 'get off your butt and vote,' and we are part of a voter activist organization that —"
 "Hold on now, are you telling me to get off my butt and —"
 "No, Mr. Jones, not at all. We're just calling all registered voters who have not yet sent in their mail-in ballots for the Senate election. We're asking voters to remember to fill out their ballots and to put them in the mail."
 "You're kidding me, right? Hey, I know. This is the radio station, isn't it? Did I win the trip to the Cotton Bowl? — YAHOO! SON OF A GUN, I'M GOING TO THE COTTON BOWL!"
 "Uh, Mr. Jones? This is not the radio station."
 Click.
 "Mr. Jones?"
 Oregonians may soon find themselves confronted over the phone or at the door by vote-hustling campaign members (like our fictitious Rick Roodman) as the different campaign organizations gear up to remind the state to vote. Oregon will be the first state in the country to hold a congressional election via the mail. Ballots will be mailed to registered voters Nov. 15-17, and bal-

lots will be counted on Dec. 5.

According to Lane County Elections officials, the mail-in campaign is an experiment the whole nation is watching.

We have some concerns about being the guinea pigs.

While every election is important, congressional races are vital to a state's representation in Congress. The problem is, voting is already so accessible and "easy to do" that making it easier only encourages more uninformed voters to punch their ballots.

Voters who know and understand the issues are the best kind of voters; they are motivated to cast votes on the measures and for the candidates they feel can bring solutions to society's problems.

Die-hard voters don't need "fast food" voting gimmicks to get them interested in the political process or phone calls and knocks at the door to remind them to vote.

As it stands, all that any U.S. resident aged 18 or older has to do to become a registered and eligible voter is go to the nearest post office (or to one of the many campus locations) and fill out a voter-registration card. The county then sends a precinct card to the individual.

We are also concerned about the thin line between lawful privacy and harassment that may be crossed by overzealous campaign callers and door-to-door "salespeople."

Without the curtains of the polling booth, the only way voters may be able to ensure their privacy is to shut the door or hang up the phone.



Psst! How'd you like to buy a forest?

What would you say if I told you that you could buy the Three Sisters Wilderness Area? What if I told you that a corporation from Southern California is going to buy the Rogue River Wild and Scenic Area?

You'd say I was nuts, right? Well, a bill in the Senate right now would allow private interests to buy national forests.

Sen. Conrad Burns, R-Mont., and Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, the two bad boys of Western politics, have introduced a bill that would rob America of its national treasures. They call it the "National Land Commission Bill." Its purpose is to set up a commission to study the "best management" of public lands.

This commission could sell or trade public lands from the three major managers of federal lands (i.e., the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Forest Service) to private interests.

This means that a bank in Japan or a corporation from Iran could buy the Willamette National Forest. NOTHING in this bill exempts wilderness or wild and scenic areas — they could be swapped for assets owned by a private entity (suppose Bill Gates is in the market for a river), or by a corporation (maybe Georgia-Pacific would like to bid on the Umpqua), or by another country (maybe Japan will call in a loan or two).

This contemptible piece of legislation would cut administration and management funds in half for the BLM, the Forest Service and the Bureau of Reclamation. Such a cut would downsize staff and close field offices, squeezing off their already-inadequate ability to properly manage our resources.

The bill would also cut land-management funds by 30 percent. These funds include reforestation, fragile ecosystem preservation, range reform and mining-damaged waterway cleanup. There isn't nearly enough money for these projects as it is, and Burns and Craig want to cut it even further.

Goodbye reforestation. Goodbye scenic areas. So long ecosystem management. Kiss your watersheds goodbye.

Burns and Craig also want to consolidate the land-management agencies. This devious duo intend to establish a single agency to manage lands currently overseen by the three. This new agency could sell any or all of the lands. States could pick out and purchase the prime areas.

Imagine the state of Oregon buying the Three

“Goodbye reforestation. Goodbye scenic areas. So long ecosystem management. Kiss your watersheds goodbye.”

COMMENTARY

Kelly Andersson

Sisters Wilderness. Can you see Peter DeFazio making decisions about managing that area? How about "Mr. Business" Gordon Smith?

Here's a question: If the Willamette National Forest went up in flames, and it was owned *not* by the federal government but by the *state*, what resources would be available to contain the fire?

The Forest Service has tremendous resources available to fight fires; Oregon does not. If we eliminate the things we don't like about the Forest Service, we only cut ourselves off from its assets.

The commission would not be staffed by anyone from the current agencies. No one with expertise in managing the grasslands in southeast Oregon, for example, could participate in the commission's decisions.

The list of the bill's evils goes on and on, but perhaps the worst is this: The commission alone has the power to determine which lands are sold, traded or given away. Not Congress. Not our representatives. Not our current managers. The commissioners serve for the life of the commission, and they answer to no one.

You may think this bill doesn't have a chance. You're dead wrong.

Western legislators love this idea. Many of them have whined for years that the "know-nothings from back East" have too much say in the management of "our" Western forest lands. Not long ago, I heard Bob Packwood carry on in front of a bunch of loggers and Boise Cascade folks about the PTA ladies in New York and the dumb farmers from Iowa who know nothing about managing "our" forest land.

Packwood suggested we who live here know best how to manage our lands. I suggested to him that we must remember that the citizens of the Midwest, regardless of their comparatively inferior intellectual capacities, own the national forests just as much as the geniuses here do.

Unfortunately, a prevalent attitude in the West is that we *are* more knowledgeable about the forests here, so we therefore are better-equipped to manage the land, so we therefore *should* manage the land.

It's not just cowboys who think this. Other Western legislators do, too.

This bill must be stopped in its tracks. Don't mess around. Call Mark Hatfield today and insist that he stop it. His phone number is (202) 224-3753. You can send him a fax message at (202) 224-0276.

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