

Protecting Oregon from the voters

OUR OPINION: The power of voting must be balanced against the future of the state

It's not surprising that less than 50 percent of the population votes in any given election. Voting is not easy. And with 23 measures to vote on in the last Oregon ballot, 1996 was no exception.

Unfortunately, of the people who do vote, many don't put the time and effort into the process that is needed to make intelligent decisions. Reading through complicated and often misleading measures is hard work, even for the most educated citizens. It's much easier to simply vote for what sounds good instead of researching all the issues involved.

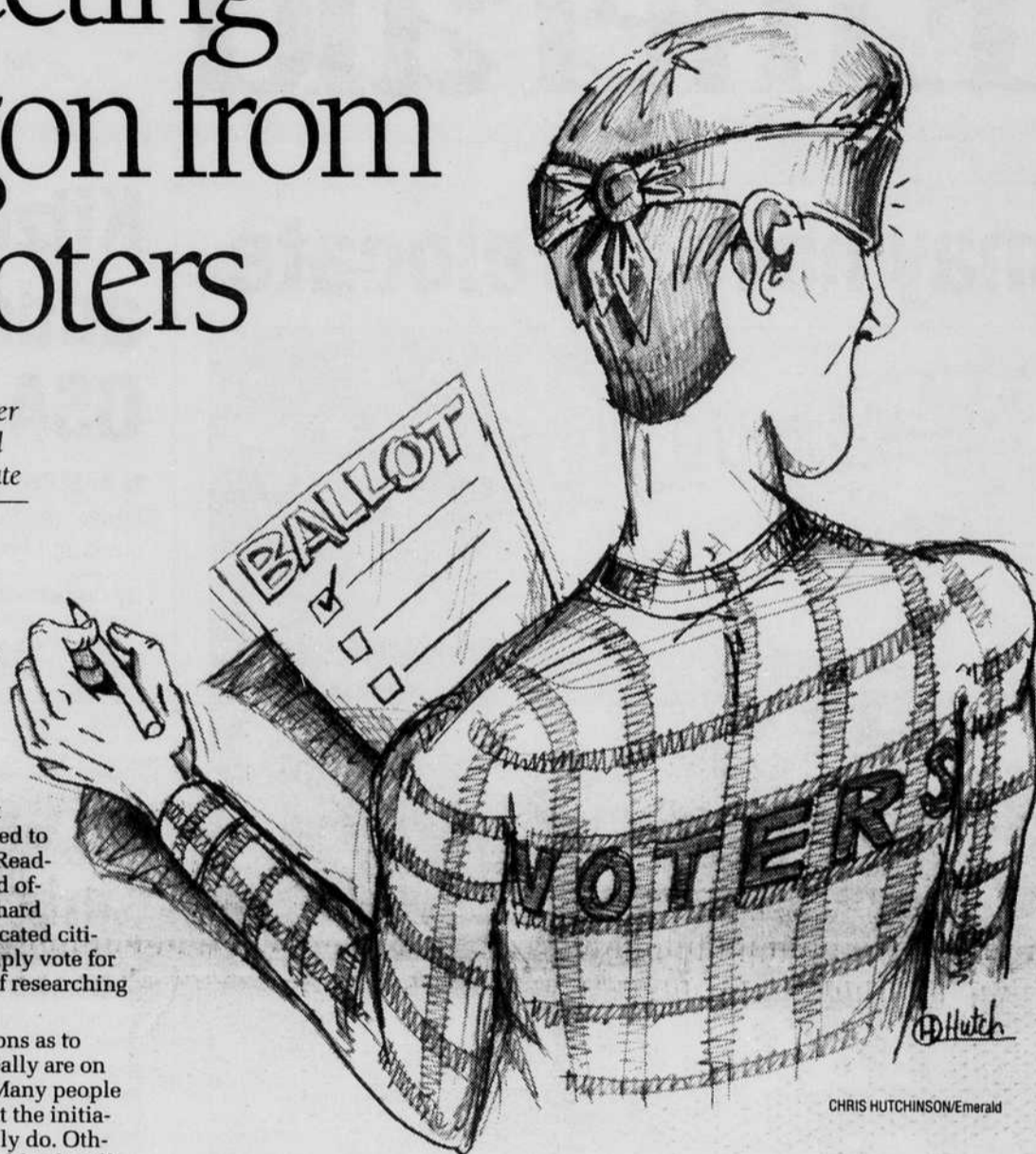
This raises serious questions as to how well prepared voters really are on the issues they do vote on. Many people don't have a clue about what the initiatives they voted for will really do. Others for initiatives that sound like they'll do one thing but end up doing the opposite.

This leads to frustrated voters who don't understand why the measures they passed don't do anything and agitated legislators who are forced to cope with poorly thought-out initiatives (e.g. Measure 47).

In response to these frustrations, legislators have been creating ways to change the process that puts initiatives on the ballot. The idea is to come up with a process in which the state will have more flexibility in changing initiatives passed by the voters.

Requiring more signatures for an initiative to get on the ballot and less signatures to amend it is one possible solution. This would supposedly weed out the more confusing initiatives and make it easier for "bad" initiatives to be changed. Also, legislators would be given more freedom to amend initiatives that could cause potential problems if they are passed.

On one hand, our elected representatives have a greater understanding of what



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

the initiatives we vote on will really do. We elect representatives because the average person doesn't have the time to fully analyze every issue.

In addition, when voters pass initiatives that change the state constitution, the future of the state may be put in jeopardy, not just in the immediate future, but for years to come. The state shouldn't suffer for decades because voters passed an ill-conceived amendment.

On the other hand, it is important that citizens retain their fundamental power to have an effect on the government. Giving legislators the freedom to change any measure passed by voters violates the very principles our democracy was founded on.

Changing the requirements for the amount of signatures required to put a measure on the ballot has problems of its own. Today, many firms specialize in gathering signatures for people who want a measure passed.

Increasing the number of signatures needed will not necessarily lead to an in-

crease in the quality of the initiatives voters have to choose from. Instead it will provide an unfair advantage to people with more money and make the initiative process less accessible to the rest of the population.

While it is understandable, especially after the last election, that legislators want a way to prevent voters from voting in questionable initiatives, voters must be able to have a say in the state's future. It is inevitable that voters will at times make bad decisions, but that is just part of living in a democracy.

Efforts to prevent initiatives from altering the constitution in ways that will harm the state are certainly worthwhile. Efforts that prevent voters from having a say in the future of the state, no matter how tempting, must be avoided. A balance must be struck between protecting the future of the state and the power of the voters.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board.

All thumbs



The College Board
The organization behind the dreaded SATs fulfilled every college-bound student's dream when compiling last fall's test. A 17-year-old New Hampshire student discovered a flaw in a question on the math portion of the exam. Now, over 45,000 high school students will have their scores boosted by as much as 30 points.

O.J. exposure
Various legal options, including a series of appeals, still await the O.J. Simpson legal team — and the public. We don't mind the appeals; they're all part of the process. But more media overexposure will be hard to take.

"Lobby Day"
The influx of University alumni and officials to Salem on Tuesday to lobby for higher education was encouraging. But the energy and time spent cannot be isolated to just one day to see long-term results.

Skinner Butte delay
On Tuesday, a federal magistrate gave lawyers a week to write legal arguments against one posed in favor of the cross by the American Legion. This decision delayed any final ruling on the cross but will provide a more balanced and researched conclusion.

Corrections

■ In the Feb. 10 story, "Hyundai plant protesters stage candlelight vigil," Moshe Immerman's quote should have read: "So we've got to get involved in our process; We've got to say this is not financially responsible; No more giveaways to Hyundai or HMT; No more electronics companies here. We must have an environmental impact study if anybody else wants to come here at all. But most of all, we have to take charge of our own future."

■ In the Feb. 12 edition, three articles contained errors. In the story, "Judge delays cross decision," Thomas Coffin was incorrectly identified as a U.S. District Judge. His title is actually U.S. Magistrate.

■ In the article, "BSU recognizes black history," Black Student Union Director Lakeyshua Washington's name was misspelled. In the news briefs section, some event times were misstated. The University Outdoor Program's events with writer Dick Person will be on Feb. 19, 20 and 22, not this week as printed.

The Emerald regrets the errors.

LETTERS

PC limits debate

The opinion piece on the Ebonics debate makes a valid point (Feb. 7, ODE). Too often when dealing with societal issues, we focus on the minor items rather than look at the bigger picture. In the case of racially divisive issues, however, the ODE misses the boat as to causes.

Many people will not discuss racial issues from any larger perspective due to the fact that any attempt at rational, issues-centered debate which contradicts today's PC crowd (which the ODE definitely qualifies as) will get one branded as a racist. (Wit-

ness the fate of Student Senator Sari Wisch for merely questioning the MCC.) Until people can discuss and debate without being labeled and branded, don't expect any intelligent discourse.

Stefan Baratto
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No cool T-shirt

Recently the Emerald posed the following trivia question: What was originally at the site of 150 Columbia? I promptly called

the number provided, only to be informed that the question had already been answered. Then reference was made to a certain men's athletic facility.

"But that is incorrect," I protested. "According to the actual wording of the question, the answer should have been: grass and trees, perhaps the odd bit of bear flop."

After a pleasant chuckle at my perceived wit, the periodical's representative conceded that I was indeed accurate in my analysis of the problem as posed and that, "in the future," more care should be taken regarding specifics.

In the future... but in the meantime, I have no "cool T-shirt" nor a "\$5 classified gift certificate" to call my own.

"This is a major university!" was, upon reflection, my incensed thought. "Should not more attention be paid to accuracy within its confines and by those who profess to represent it?"

But then, I realized that the conundrum in question had appeared in a five-days-per-week-and-not-during-breaks publication self-named the Oregon Daily Emerald.

Bill Smees
Kiosk attendant
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