

## GUEST EDITORIAL FROM THE ALBANY DEMOCRAT HERALD

# Examining the ebb tide in initiatives

By Mike McInally

Oregon voters will face just five statewide ballot issues in the November election, the lowest number in nearly four decades and a surprising development in a state that in recent years hasn't been shy about pushing initiatives onto the ballot.

In a recent editorial, we speculated about the reasons behind the decline; at the time we wrote that four measures had qualified for the ballot. Shortly after that, Measure 106, a constitutional amendment that would ban public funds from being spent on abortions in Oregon, became the fifth measure to earn a slot on the ballot.

All five measures take on hot-button issues in Oregon, and at least four of them likely will draw plenty of attention in the fall campaign. The exception likely will be Measure 102, which would allow local governments to issue bonds to pay for affordable housing projects that involve nonprofits or other nongovernmental entities. Our guess is that measure is unlikely to be particularly controversial.

That won't be the case for the other ballot measures. In addition to the abortion issue, consider these:

- Measure 103 is a constitutional amendment that would bar new taxes on groceries, including food and soda, as well as freeze the state's corporate minimum tax for supermarkets.
- Measure 104 is a constitutional amendment that would require a three-fifths supermajority for legislation that raises revenue through changes in tax exemptions, credits and deductions.
- Measure 105 would overturn the 1987 sanctuary law that prohibits state and local police from enforcing immigration law if a person's only violation is being in the country illegally.

Since the initial editorial appeared, other political observers have weighed in on the reasons why this Oregon ballot is so light on initiatives. Some have mentioned, as we did, the various changes in signature-gathering procedures that have tended to make it more difficult to get initiatives on the ballot. We don't think this is necessarily a bad thing. It should be hard to get an initiative on the ballot, just like it should be hard to get a bill passed by the Legislature. We often forget that a vital role for the Legislature is to stop bad ideas from becoming law; you can assess for yourself how successful Oregon's Legislature has been at that task.

Other longtime political observers, such as former Secretary of State Phil Keisling, argue voters are simply burned out on initiatives. We suspect there's a measure of truth to that.

Another factor we hadn't considered: Money that used to be spent on ballot measures is flowing instead to legislative candidates. In 2016, the newspaper noted, more than \$11 million was spent on legislative races.

The relatively small number of initiatives on the ballot isn't a bad thing: It gives voters a fighting chance to consider each of the measures with greater care.



## There is a solution to bridging the digital divide

Congressman Greg Walden and Federal Communications Commission Chairman Ajit Pai recently wrapped up a tour of Eastern Oregon focusing on identifying solutions to bring affordable broadband to the rural areas of our state that have been left behind in the digital revolution.

Given the fact that more than one in three rural Oregonians lack broadband access, their visit was certainly welcome news to thousands.

It is not only encouraging to see our representative in Washington take this seriously, but having Chairman Pai travel all the way to Oregon to see firsthand the challenges many of us are facing daily demonstrates his unwavering commitment to bridging the digital divide.

As both leaders pointed out in their Eastern Oregon visit, they are taking definitive steps to remove barriers standing in the way of broadband deployment and to help local providers build rural networks.

For example, by passing the Ray Baum's Act, Congress made it easier to develop necessary broadband infrastructure on federal lands. And each year the FCC's Universal Service Fund gives billions in grants to help local providers build rural networks.

Here in the City of Ukiah, we recently joined a coalition called Connect Americans Now (CAN). More than anything, we believe there is urgent need for leaders to take action right now to bridge the rural digital divide, and I think Pai and Walden realize there are tools and resources at our disposal that can make progress on needs like precision agriculture, whole-farm coverage and telemedicine. Fortunately, CAN's plan is all about immediate, cost-effective solutions.

Our coalition has a plan to bridge the digital divide by adopting an "all-of-the-above" approach harnessing what is known as TV white space technology, a plan we think is a perfect complement to Chairman Pai and Rep. Walden's efforts. TV white space refers to the unused spectrum between broadcast television channels, and it is ideal for casting broadband signals long distances and

over barriers such as hills, trees and buildings.

While this technology will not solve the problem alone, it is the most cost-effective solution for population densities between two and 200 people per square mile.

When used as part of an all-of-the-above approach with existing solutions such as fiber and fixed wireless, it could cut the cost of bridging the digital divide by 80 percent, according to the Rural Broadband Strategy published by the Boston Consulting Group ([www.blogs.microsoft.com/uploads/2017/07/Rural-Broadband-Strategy-Microsoft-Whitepaper-FINAL-7-10-17.pdf](http://www.blogs.microsoft.com/uploads/2017/07/Rural-Broadband-Strategy-Microsoft-Whitepaper-FINAL-7-10-17.pdf)).

The cost-cutting ability of CAN's solution tackles the root cause of the digital divide.

As Walden and Pai noted, local providers need to have a "stronger business case for creating and improving that access," which is why so many of us in Oregon are asking them to endorse our solution. When restricted to traditional technologies, providers simply cannot make a profit when building rural networks. But this all-of-the-above approach could finally offer providers a way to build economically viable networks throughout the heartland.

Most encouragingly, this plan has a breadth of support across Oregon. Nearly 100 groups in the state ranging from libraries, cities and counties to trade associations like the Oregon Farm Bureau and Oregon Chamber of Commerce have joined CAN to advocate for this mixed technology model.

However, although TV white spaces are already working for thousands of rural Americans, the technology will continue to be left on the sidelines until we see definitive action in Washington.

Specifically, it is critical that the FCC allocates sufficient spectrum across the country for wireless, unlicensed use. This would allow any local service provider to leverage TV white space technology and provide the regulatory certainty necessary to connect homes, schools and clinics across the heartland.

We applaud the efforts of Rep.

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Walden and Chairman Pai. As the Chairman of the House Energy & Commerce Committee, Rep. Walden has made this issue among his top priorities, and Chairman Pai is an avowed champion for the more than 19 million rural Americans who remain on the wrong side of the digital divide.

In order to advance their efforts, I hope that both gentlemen will seriously consider the approach that CAN has endorsed and remove the regulatory barriers standing in the way of TV white space deployment.

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