

OUR VIEW

## Looking to improve turnout

State Sen. Mark Hass, D-Beaverton, believes Oregonians would be better served if they could register to vote right up through Election Day. The change, he argues, would improve voter turnout, and that's not a bad thing.

The state constitution requires would-be voters to have registered "not less than 20 days" before the next election. They also must live in Oregon for the six months preceding the election, and Hass does not propose changing the residency requirement.

But, as Hass notes, the 20-day requirement may have made sense when it was enacted in 1986. The era of modern technology had not yet taken hold, and county clerks favored the Ballot Measure 13 that established the 20-day registration cutoff.

Voters agreed, though elected officials, the League of Women Voters and other groups all opposed it, arguing that the registration deadline would reduce voter participation in elections because fewer people would be eligible to vote. A Bulletin editorial about the measure noted that in 1986, some 71,000 voters registered in the 20 days before the general election, and in 1980, more than 100,000 registered in that same time period.

Supporters of the measure argued the deadline would cut fraud and save money, and the measure passed handily.

Yet, Hass is correct in noting that technology has advanced so much since 1986 that it no longer takes 20 days to verify that those who have registered are, in fact, entitled to vote. He would let voters decide the matter, and, assuming they approved the change, he would charge the secretary of state with establishing what documentation to use to establish voter eligibility.

Hass wants to be his party's candidate for secretary of state in 2020, and he no doubt sees changing the registration deadline as something that voters will favor. But he's also likely right in his belief that same-day registration will get more Oregonians to the polls. It's a change worth trying.

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MY VOICE

## New economic catalysts boost Eastern Oregon counties

It's often said "the only constant in life is change."

Recent visits to new economic catalysts growing in Grant and Umatilla counties have shown me how both communities have embraced that adage to build on their traditional strengths to generate good-paying jobs in Eastern Oregon.

Lots of rural Oregon faces real economic hurt, which is why I wrote the Secure Rural Schools legislation that's brought more than \$3 billion over the years to those communities for schools, roads and public safety.

But earlier this month at Malheur Lumber just outside John Day, I also saw new shoots of economic success when I toured the new Restoration Fuels site. This plant taps innovative technology to take the biomass of small trees and convert it — via a process called torrefaction — into a non-fossil fuel energy source.

The technology is astounding. And so is the economic opportunity — I heard firsthand from plant officials how they're hiring people in this rural Oregon town at family-wage salaries.

These developments are a credit to farsighted leaders at Malheur Lumber, such as company owner John Shelk, who's committed to maintaining the sawmill in John Day. I was proud to team with Malheur Lumber, Iron Triangle and the forest collaborative to push for a 10-year stewardship contract that increased timber harvest and a steady, certain supply of biomass.

This forest restoration work isn't easy. It requires folks working together to find common ground, and it required local industry partners like Malheur Lumber, Oregon Torrefaction and Iron Triangle to develop new markets for forest products that used to burn up in slash piles bigger than semi-trucks.

And I'm working to get even more biomass to support family-wage jobs by

About the author



Ron Wyden is the senior U.S. senator for the state of Oregon. My Voice columns should be 500-

700 words. Submissions should include a portrait-type photograph of the author. Authors also should include their full name, age, occupation and relevant organizational memberships. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those published elsewhere. Send columns to La Grande Observer, 1406 5th St., La Grande 97850, fax them to 541-963-7804 or email them to [news@lagrandeobserver.com](mailto:news@lagrandeobserver.com).

pressing the administration for even more fuels reduction and thinning on the national forests.

This torrefaction project in Grant County and the people behind it have shown the entire country all that can be accomplished with biomass — and provided a valuable job-creating model to learn from.

A similar good-news Eastern Oregon economic story is playing out up U.S. 395 in Umatilla County.

This summer, I toured the Pendleton Airport hangar where the aerospace company PAE ISR has set up shop to work on unmanned aerial vehicles.

As at Malheur Lumber, the new technology developed by PAE ISR — and the jobs they support in Eastern Oregon — are impressive. In Pendleton, I met with PAE ISR workers earning six-figure salaries. And I met PAE ISR manager Ken Bisconer, who's passionate about creating new education programs so young people have the

skills and training to work in this well-paid field.

UAV technology is hugely exciting for Eastern Oregon. I'm a privacy hawk, but I think we can thread the needle and support UAV technology for civilian uses like mountaintop rescue, precision agriculture, fighting wildfires and more without sacrificing privacy protections.

And just as in Grant County with biomass, these changes in Pendleton didn't happen by osmosis. They're a credit to local visionaries such as Pendleton Mayor John Turner, Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock, Pendleton Economic Development/Airport Manager Steve Chrisman, and Oregon National Guard Colonel Alan Gronewald.

Pendleton and Eastern Oregon can take justifiable pride in carving out a big part in the core of a growing industry that pays well and creates a whirlwind of fresh economic activity.

I see my job representing Oregon as setting the temperature for fresh new enterprises to grow in rural Oregon.

And I'm honored to have partnered with local officials to ensure new enterprises such as UAV test ranges could develop in Pendleton as well as in Warm Springs and Tillamook. We have extended operation of these test ranges through 2023, and I will keep fighting for these proven job generators.

Of course, there's no single solution to ensuring the rural Oregon economy can flourish.

But I believe these positive examples of smart change in Grant and Umatilla counties are significant shoots of success that should be celebrated. These examples — along with support for historic rural Oregon enterprises, such as agriculture, ranching and forestry, as well as new opportunities in areas like recreation and hemp — can continue creating new good-paying jobs for generations to come.

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