

OUR VIEW

Time to consider taking politicians out of redistricting

Oregonians elect politicians to make decisions about the collection of taxes, spending that revenue and policies that shape lives. But perhaps we should be more skeptical when granting politicians the authority to shape voting districts.

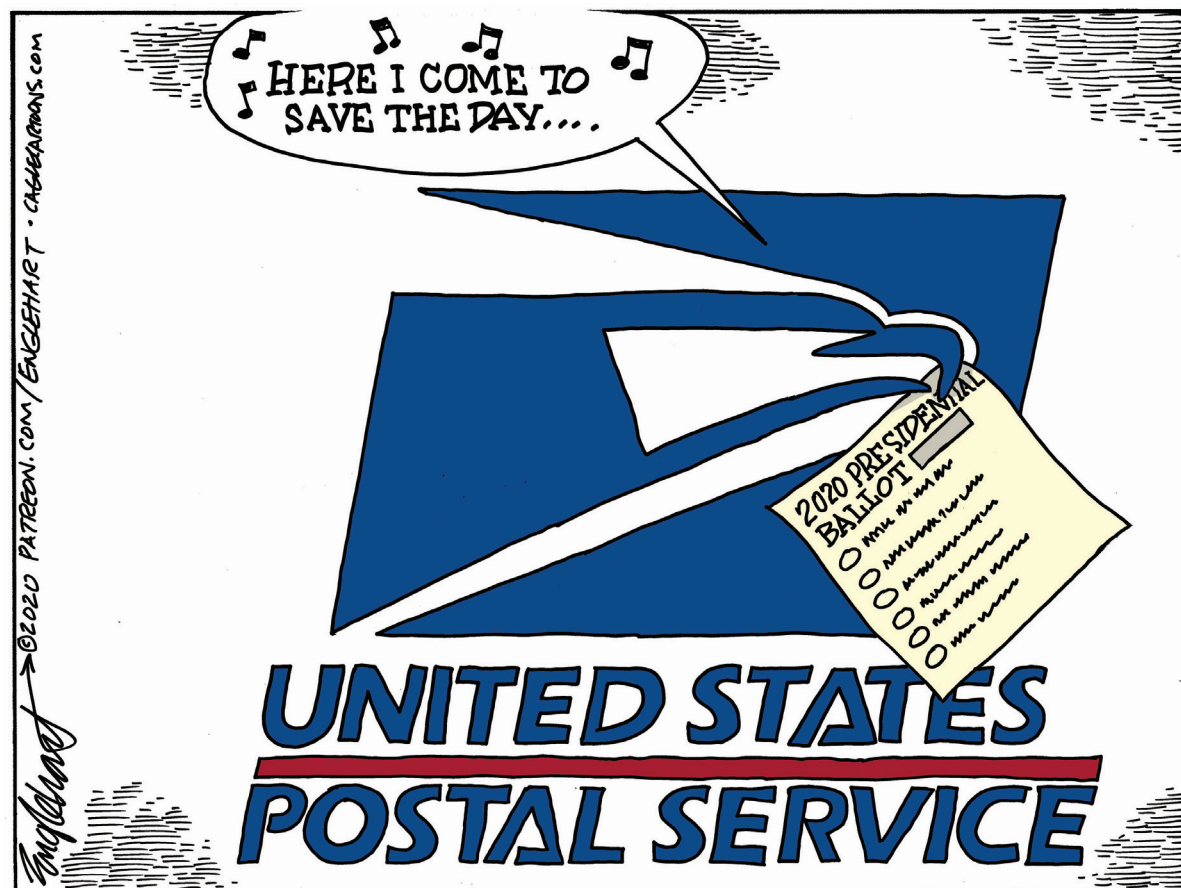
A proposed ballot measure takes on that one, aiming to take politicians out of political redistricting. The measure would create a citizen commission to draw the lines. How fair that would be compared to how the state handles redistricting now is the question.

The new census will lead to redrawing of Oregon's congressional and legislative districts. Legislators in Oregon now redraw those boundaries.

That could be putting the fox in charge of the henhouse — at least that's what the groups supporting a citizen commission argue.

The measure has the backing of the League of Women Voters of Oregon, Oregon Common Cause, the Independent Party, The Taxpayer Association of Oregon and others.

The measure would amend the Oregon Constitution to establish an independent redistricting commission consisting of 12 Oregonians. They would hold public meetings across the state and draw up the boundaries with the goal of using an open and fair process, respecting communities and having less parti-



sanship and other political manipulations.

The proposal takes substantial steps to keep politicians out of it. People would apply for the commission spots. Basically, paid politicians could not serve on the commission. People who recently ran for such offices also could not, nor could their staff. Likewise, the measure would bar political consultants. An individual who gave more than \$2,700 a year to any single candidate also would be out of the mix.

There also are requirements to limit the members from the two largest political parties and include nonaffiliated voters. Administrative

law judges would winnow the pool of applicants for commission candidates, who would eventually be chosen by lot. The governor could remove someone from the commission, but only with a two-thirds majority of the Senate.

If you are interested, you should read the full text of the proposal, not just how we or its advocates summarize it. The website is www.peoplenotpoliticiansoregon.com. Supporters are trying to gather enough signatures to get it on the ballot.

Gerrymandering began before it was called gerrymandering, before the country's independence. It's the idea of drawing a voting dis-

trict so it will get a certain kind of candidate elected.

The term gerrymandering comes from an 1812 political cartoon satirizing Massachusetts Gov. Elbridge Gerry for signing a bill that established a partisan district resembling the shape of a salamander. The law redrew state senate districts to ensure Gerry's party — Thomas Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans — would be strong and John Adams' and Alexander Hamilton's Federalists would be weak.

It worked, and one of the districts resembled the shape of a salamander, thus Gerrymander was born.

The U.S. Supreme Court

has been reluctant to decide when partisanship goes too far in gerrymandering. It would require two facets difficult for the courts: defining what is fair and divining the future. What's a clear test for fairness? Fair to whom? Fair to what? As Chief Justice John Roberts wrote, choosing one "poses basic questions that are political, not legal."

The courts also would have to look at a district and somehow know that in the future the outcomes it creates would turn out to be unfair — by some definition. It's additionally unclear the founders intended judges to decide such things.

These days, leaning on big data, political consultants have more tools than ever to draw up districts to get an outcome they want. And if legislators are making the redistricting decisions, voters can hold them accountable, but that could come after new districts are in effect.

An independent redistricting commission creates a way to try to minimize the influence of some politicians on the process. Commissioners still will have to make choices about defining what is fair. They will have to guess if sticking the lines in one place will produce more "fair" outcomes in the future. We don't know if the commission would be more fair. It might. But it would get more Oregonians involved in making important decisions about how they are governed.

Drive-in theaters poised to profit from pandemic

Here's one COVID-19 silver lining: The drive-in theater, a uniquely American creation, is doing booming business again.

I've long been nostalgic for this wonderful



TOM PURCELL
SYNDICATED COLUMNIST

piece of Americana. When I was growing up in the '70s, my mother and father often packed my five sisters and I into our massive station wagon to see outdoor movies.

America's first drive-in theater opened on June 6, 1933 in Camden, N.J. According to History.com, it was the creation of Richard Hollingshead, whose mother found indoor theaters uncomfortable. His idea, which he patented, was to create "an open-air theater" that would let patrons watch movies from "the comfort of their own

automobiles." The concept was a success, but it wasn't until 1949, when Hollingshead's patent was overturned, that drive-in theaters began opening all over

the country. "The popularity of the drive-in spiked after

World War II and reached its heyday in the late 1950s to mid-60s, with some 5,000 theaters across the country," reports History.com. "Drive-ins became an icon of American culture ..."

Kerry Segrave, author of "Drive-in Theaters: A History from Their Inception in 1933," explains that the boom resulted from several uniquely American trends in the 1950s.

New highway systems allowed entrepreneurs to purchase inexpensive farmland for outdoor theaters, which

patrons could easily drive to.

Americans' love of the automobile also was important. Car designs were bold and creative — the 1957 Chevy is still widely loved as a classic, beautiful design.

American cars in the '50s weren't just machines to get people to and from places — they were statements. Americans loved spending time in their cars, including hours at drive-in theaters.

And with the baby boom well under way, for many single-income families with more than two children — like my family — the drive-in theater was one of the few entertainment venues they could afford.

We attended outdoor movies frequently in the mid-1970s and it was always a treat. The cooler was packed with soda pop and sandwiches. The family-size potato chip bag could feed a

village. We lowered the tailgate of our Plymouth Fury station wagon and set up a glorious buffet on it.

Soon, the blue sky fell dark and the film projector began rattling. Black-and-white numbers — "5, 4, 3, 2, 1" — flashed onto the screen. Yellowed 1950s footage advertised hot dogs, popcorn and other concession items we could never get our father to buy. Finally, the feature film — such as "The Love Bug" — would play.

The drive-in theater never was as popular in any other country as it was in America. All great things come to an end, however. In 1978, as operating costs grew and rising land values encouraged entrepreneurs to sell to developers, the drive-in theater began to decline.

The United Drive-in Theatre Owners Association says only 305 drive-in-the-

aters now exist — and, boy, are they needed now, as the coronavirus, and its social-distancing mandates, are impeding freedom to be entertained.

I trust that many more entrepreneurs, the lifeblood of our economy and the engines that will drive our economic recovery, will invent creative ways to get us to the movies. Large, blow-up screens? Temporary theaters in mall parking lots? How about dinner and a movie in restaurant parking lots?

Where there's a need, a solution quickly follows, as the American drive-in theater is reinvented all over again.

About the Author
Tom Purcell, author of "Misadventures of a 1970's Childhood," a humorous memoir available at amazon.com, is a Pittsburgh Tribune-Review humor columnist and is nationally syndicated.

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE
NEWSSTAND PRICE: \$1.50
You can save up to 34% off the single-copy price with home delivery.
Call 541-963-3161 to subscribe.

Subscription rates per month:
Union & Wallowa Co.\$11.80
By mail, all other U.S.\$15

THE OBSERVER
An independent newspaper founded in 1896
(USPS 299-260)

Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, Oregon 97801. Published Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (except Dec. 25) by EO Media Group, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)

Phone: 541-963-3161
Toll free (Oregon): 1-800-781-3214
Fax: 541-963-7804
Email: news@lagrandeobserver.com
Website: www.lagrandeobserver.com
Street address: 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande

POSTMASTER
Send address changes to:
The Observer,
911 Jefferson Ave.,
La Grande, OR 97850
Periodicals postage paid at:
Pendleton, Oregon 97801

STAFF

Publisher.....Karrine Brogotti
Regional circulation directorKelli Craft
EditorPhil Wright
News clerk.....Lisa Lester Kelly
Sports editorRonald Bond
Reporter.....Dick Mason
Reporter.....Sabrina Thompson

ClassifiedsDevi Mathson
Home delivery advisorAmanda Fredrick
Advertising representativeJuli Bloodgood
Advertising representativeAmy Horn
Graphic design supervisorDorothy Kautz

Chris Rush, Regional Publisher

