



EO Media Group file photo
The majority of voters in Union and Wallowa counties returned their ballots in the May 19 primary. Voter turnout statewide fell below 50%.

OUR VIEW

Thank you, local voters

Union County voter turnout in last week's election neared 58%, according to the Oregon Secretary of State's website, while Wallowa County voters returned more than 66% of their ballots.

It's heartening to see the residents of Union and Wallowa counties take elections seriously enough to surpass 50% turnout. Maybe the sheriff races in each county helped generate local interest in voting. But neighboring counties and much of the rest of Oregon dragged down the overall turnout.

Baker County was just shy of 50% turnout, and Umatilla County, the most populous county in Eastern Oregon, fell short at 36.6%.

The state average was 46.4%. Thus, once again, most Oregon voters did not bother to submit their mail-in ballots.

Voters in other states have to stand in line for hours to cast a vote, and during a pandemic, no less. Oregonians this year did not even have to put a stamp on their return envelopes.

Complaining about politicians and public policy and decrying long-serving public officials are regular pastimes. But those who have held office often know the problems facing all levels of government are more complex than they seem to the casual observer. Those whose names appeared on the primary ballot were willing to sign up for an often thankless job. And democracy works best when the majority participates.

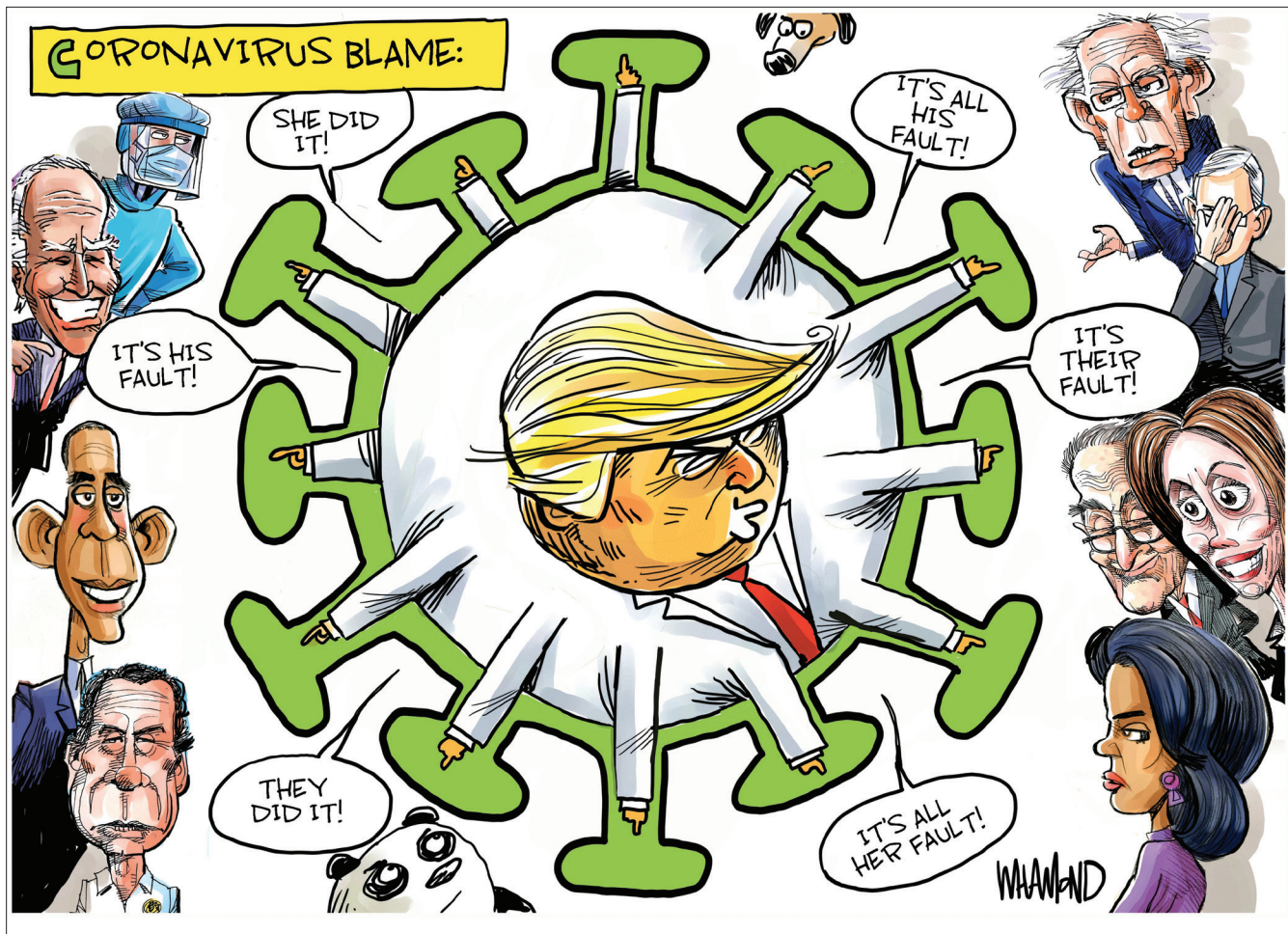
It was good voters had choices in plenty of district and statewide races, and even in some local races. We're looking forward to seeing those who rose to the top compete in November. No doubt, the heat will rise once more in the Union County sheriff race, where it looks deputy Cody Bowen has a serious shot at unseating his boss, Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen.

The real boon in that race, however, is the opportunity for a face-to-face debate — or, rather, a forum — between the candidates as coronavirus restrictions ease. Here's an idea: How about in the fall, Rasmussen and Bowen have an in-person forum where they answer questions from Bill Miller and Shane Rollins, the other two candidates who were in the primary?

Well, unless Miller pulls ahead as the county works through verifying the signatures on a couple hundred ballots. That's a long shot, but not impossible. In either case, having the losing challengers question the run-off candidates could prove interesting.

We also want to thank those voters who participated in choosing who will represent us in our communities, the Oregon Capitol and Washington, D.C.

And much of the rest of Oregon can take a lesson in democratic participation from those of us in this corner of the state. We hope to see more of you in November.



OTHER VIEWS

More than ever, corporate governance matters

The COVID-19 crisis has likely changed American business forever as politicians use the deadly pandemic to push for changes that will have a major impact on how corporations operate.



PETER ROFF
FRONTIERS OF FREEDOM

How business respond will determine the future of American commerce for years. Important business leaders like Black Rock's Larry Fink are pushing companies to expand their mission beyond maximizing value for shareholders into things that are on progressives' political wish list.

What Fink and others are advocating for drifts harmfully towards what progressives promote as they seek to control the business sector and move to a centrally planned economy.

If the American economy is to survive, let alone thrive, we need corporate leaders to step up in defense of the free market. They need to eschew the insider deals and crony capitalism that have caused many Americans, especially the young, to lose faith in what, as Churchill might have quipped, is the worst of all possible economic systems except for all the others.

There are heroes out there like Tesla's Elon Musk, who recently stood up to California Gov. Gavin Newsom and other officials who would not permit his California manufacturing plant to reopen and get people back to work. To Musk's credit, even though his empire is built on questionable tax breaks, credits, and subsidies, he pushed back where other business

leaders have sheepishly complied. He announced he'd be taking his company and the jobs he created to Texas or Nevada, where they would be welcomed. Faced with that, Newsom and company seem to have backed down.

For every hero, there are goats like Alan Armstrong, the CEO of Williams Co., an energy pipeline company. According to recent allegations made in a Delaware court, he secretly worked to undermine a 2016 board-approved merger between his firm and Energy Transfer, a Texas-based pipeline company, that would have paid shareholders a significant premium over the then-market value of their shares.

Nearly four years since it fell through, Williams continues to seek more than a billion dollars in breakup fees, despite Armstrong's recently alleged involvement in the deal's demise.

According to court documents, he even worked behind the scenes with a former Williams senior vice president by using a personal account and leaking inside information to assist a lawsuit filed to block the proposed and ultimately unconsummated merger. As a result, half of his board of directors resigned days after the deal was called off, citing a lack of confidence in his ability to lead the company.

The reason he acted as he did, the court was told, was out of a desire to maintain his position as CEO even if his continued leadership of the company was detrimental to shareholder

interests. Actions like these in the corporate community have regular Americans — more and more of whom join the investor class every day through their 401(k)s, Roth IRAs, and by trading stocks online — wondering if their money is safe, or if they're just feeding corporate cats growing fat off their investments.

Warren Buffet, one of the country's most respected financial leaders, argued in a recent interview that not enough attention is paid to corporate leadership and governance.

"Almost all of the directors I have met over the years have been decent, likable and intelligent," he said. "Nevertheless, many of these good souls are people whom I would never have chosen to handle money or business matters. It simply was not their game."

If the CEOs and boards of America's companies don't step up to restore public confidence in who they are and what they do, then the politicians will — as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi tried to do in the first coronavirus relief bill. Other than the privileged few that would have been picked to serve on boards if her proposed amendment requiring diversity on corporate boards had been adopted, it would have been bad for business and everyone else.

The clock is running.
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