

Our View

New faces bring questions, possibilities

The Union County Republican Central Committee’s move to elect a cadre of candidates to the La Grande City Council met with as much success as failure.

Dr. David Glabe squeaked by for a win against incumbent Corrine Dutto, and John Bozarth defeated David Moyal for the open seat on the council. But Councilor Nicole Howard fended off challenger Denise Wheeler, and Mayor Steve Clements trounced Alex McHaddad.

Rather than any red wave, maybe it was more a low tide.

The results are unofficial, but the vote was in and done Wednesday morning. Unlike the outcome of a certain, major national race.

What this means for La Grande city government is an open question, of course. The new council will have to take up struggles from the previous council, including homelessness, housing and economic growth, all major hurdles in Northeast Oregon, and the pandemic has not helped any.

The city, however, has worked to help businesses struggling due to COVID-19. Will the more conservative members of the new council support those efforts in 2021? And what about any further mandates clamping down on spreading the virus?

Our local election also showed money is not everything in politics, at least not at the local level.

McHaddad spent more than \$5,200 on his campaign, according to state elections financial data, and Clements spent about \$2,100.

Clements received 3,361 votes to 1,899 for McHaddad. For the mayor, that comes out to about 62 cents a vote. For McHaddad, that was about \$2.75 per vote. Maybe a little more than a tall cup of coffee.

But his campaign already proved successful at getting the city to be more transparent about council meeting agendas. And Clements in the run-up to Election Day told The Observer the city should take a look at its snow removal policy, which was one of McHaddad’s main planks. Now the mayor needs to see that conversation through, and fast. Winter is coming.

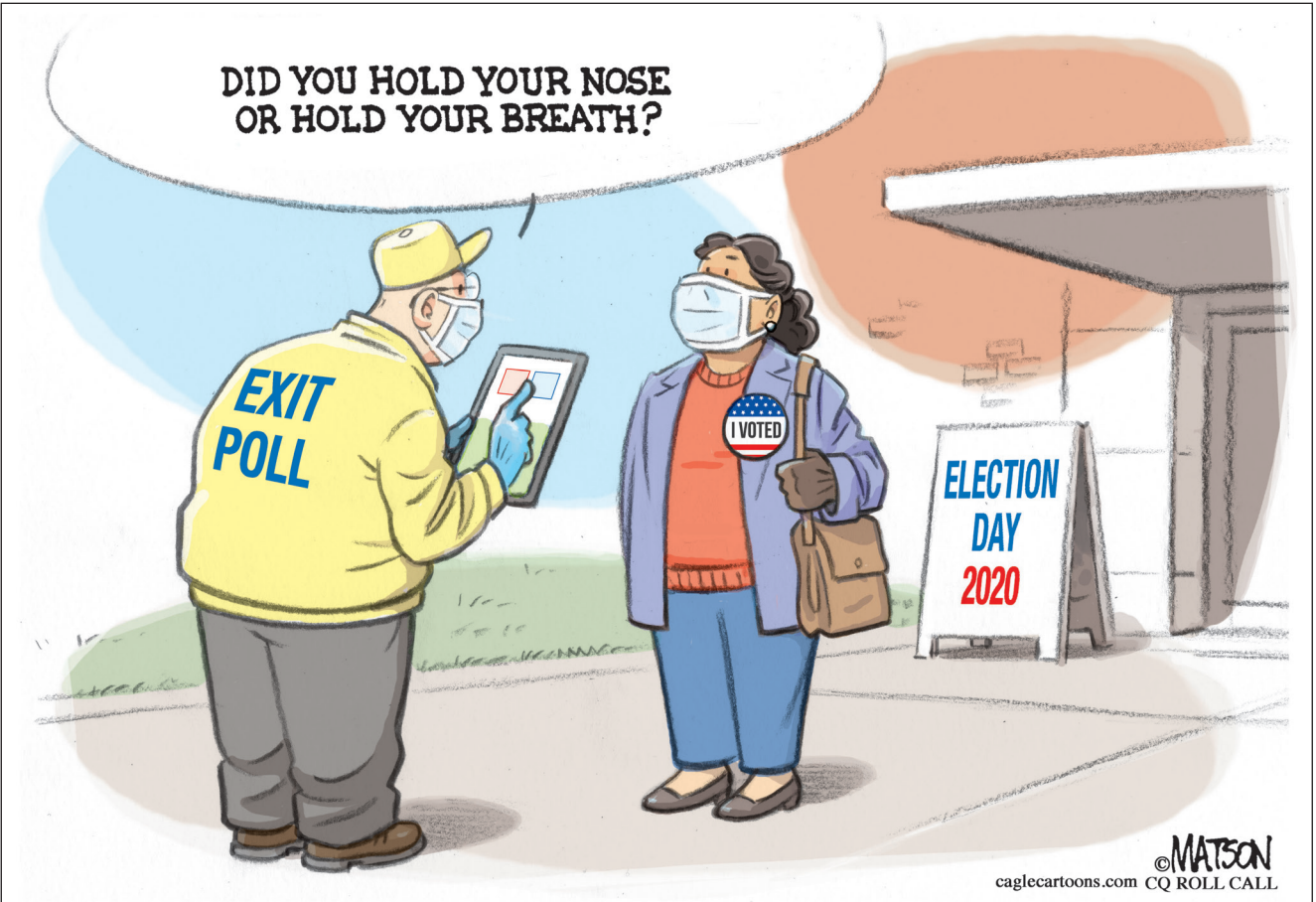
Other communities also elected new leaders, Cove residents approved an update to the city charter and Union County is getting a new sheriff.

Candidate Bill Miller spent more than \$28,500 in a write-in effort to win the seat, which he knew was an uphill slog. The write-in vote tally stands at 4,819. For the sake of argument, if all those are for Miller, the math comes out to about \$5.92 per vote in the general election.

Deputy Cody Bowen, though, proved the more popular choice and won with 8,914 votes. He spent almost \$33,600 on the campaign, most of that in the primary. Still, for the general election, that comes out to about \$3.77 per vote.

All of that looks downright frugal compared to President Donald Trump’s effort to earn a second term. Federal campaign data show the president’s campaign spent about \$1.6 billion, and election results Friday morning from The Associated Press show Trump received more than 69.6 million votes. That’s almost \$23 per vote.

Finally, congratulations to the winners. We’re sure they are eager to get started in their offices. We also want to thank the other candidates for giving local voters a choice.



Other Views

Trump, GOP assault the right to vote



The morning I turned 18, it was a blindingly hot day in early June. And there were only two items on my agenda: Running to the post office in my little New England town to register for the selective service, and then zipping across town to town hall to register to vote.

After more than half a lifetime of voting and covering politics, I’ve never lost my giddiness to vote. And though I’ve lived in five different states, a different continent and at least two time zones, I’m about 99.9% sure that I haven’t missed a single election.

And now, here in 2020, as the nation tries to survive the worst public health crisis in a century, and voters cast their ballots in a hugely consequential election, the right to vote is under a coordinated assault in my adopted home state of Pennsylvania, where the fight for the White House will very likely be won or lost.

I can’t help but wonder what today’s 18-year-olds and today’s new voters, who might be filled with the same giddiness over casting their first ballots, are feeling about this effort to silence them.

Does President Donald Trump’s reelection campaign have any idea of the damage it’s doing to the republic with a multi-pronged suppression effort that includes a blizzard of litigation

and outright voter intimidation at the polls?

I doubt that they care, or they wouldn’t be doing it in the first place. And it’s become a battle of inches.

Republicans were dealt a temporary setback last week, as the U.S. Supreme Court rejected a request to fast-track their appeal of a law that gives Pennsylvania up to three days after Election Day to accept mail-in ballots.

But the court held open the possibility that it could rule on the case after Election Day, when new Justice Amy Coney Barrett — who sat out for the ruling — will be fully up to speed, and could vote to rule for the state GOP. As a result, Pennsylvania Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar instructed counties to segregate late-arriving ballots that could end up being the subject of a court fight.

We know Republicans are doing this because mail-in balloting favors Democrats. And in a state where Trump prevailed by less than a percentage point in 2016, every vote matters.

As enraged as I’ve been by this entirely unsurprising hardball, it’s been alternately encouraging and a little heartbreaking to see Pennsylvanians turn out in their thousands to cast their ballots before the window for early, in-person voting closed on Tuesday.

Despite the risk of the pandemic and voter intimidation, Pennsylvanians still were willing to stand in long lines, braced against a damp October cold, to make sure their vote

was counted and counted safely.

And again, I have to ask myself: What message are we sending to those young voters? Or to the new citizens who fled exactly this kind of authoritarian nonsense so they could be a part of the American experiment?

Again, I think I know the answer.

We’ve been taking our daughter to the polls with us since she was a baby, so she’d know what it was like to vote, what it was like to be a participant in the affairs of the republic. As a toddler, we’d show her which buttons to press so that each vote was tallied. The smile in her eyes is one I won’t ever forget.

Now that she’s in high school, she’s been filled with questions these last few weeks as I’ve told her about the court fights, the back and forth of the campaign and what’s at stake. She’s told us she wishes she was 18, so that she could vote, too. I’m in no hurry for her to get there, but I love the sentiment no less.

Hopefully, it’ll be a blindingly hot day in early July, three years from now, when she goes down to register to vote. Hopefully we won’t have extinguished that light by then.

What we do next matters so much beyond the election.

And our children will judge us.

An award-winning political journalist, John L. Micek is editor-in-chief of The Pennsylvania Capital-Star in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Email him at jmicek@penncapital-star.com and follow him on Twitter @ByJohnLMicek.

Contact your public officials

Local officials

La Grande: City Manager Robert Strobe, 541-962-1309, fax 541-963-3333; RStrobe@cityoflagrande.org; P.O. Box 670, La Grande, OR 97850; Mayor Steve Clements, mayor@cityoflagrande.org; Councilors Gary Lillard (mayor pro tem), glillard@cityoflagrande.org; Nicole Howard, nhoward@cityoflagrande.org; Corrine Dutto, cdutto@cityoflagrande.org; Mary Ann Miesner, mmiesner@cityoflagrande.org; Justin Rock, jrock@cityoflagrande.org; and through the city manager’s office.

Elgin: City Hall, 790 S. Eighth Ave., Elgin, OR, 97827; City Recorder/Administrator Brock Eckstein, cityadm@cityofelginor.org; Mayor Allan Duffy, 541-240-9763, mayor@cityofelginor.org; Councilors Mary West, 541-805-0443, councilor3@cityofelginor.org; Kathy Warren, 541-786-9611, councilor6@cityofelginor.org; Risa Hallgarth, 541-437-9462, councilor2@cityofelginor.org; Rocky Burgess, 541-786-2417, councilor1@cityofelginor.org; David

Reed, 541-975-3306, councilor4@cityofelginor.org; and Ryan Martin, councilor5@cityofelginor.org.

Cove: City Hall, 504 Alder St., P.O. Box 8 Cove, OR 97824; City Recorder Donna Lewis, 541-568-4566, donna.lewis@cityofcove.org; Mayor Del Little, 503-508-6727.

Union County: County Courthouse: 1106 K Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-963-1001; fax 541-963-1079; Commissioners Donna Beverage, dbeverage@union-county.org, Matt Scarfo, mscarfo@union-county.org, and Paul Anderes, panderes@union-county.org; administrative officer Shelley Burgess, sburgess@union-county.org.

Wallowa County: Courthouse, 101 S. River St., Enterprise OR 97828, 541-426-4543 ext. 15; fax 541-426-0582; Commissioners Susan Roberts, ext.133, sroberts@co.wallowa.or.us; Todd Nash, ext.132, tnash@co.wallowa.or.us; John Hillock, ext.131, jhillock@co.wallowa.or.us.

United States officials

President Donald Trump: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1414; fax 202-456-2461; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov/contact.

Rep. Greg Walden (2nd District): walden.house.gov; D.C. office: 2182 Rayburn Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515; 202-225-6730; La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400; fax, 541-624-2402.

Sen. Jeff Merkley: merkley.senate.gov; D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St., Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386. Pendleton: 310 S.E. Second St., Suite 105, Pendleton 97801; 541-278-1129.

Sen. Ron Wyden: wyden.senate.gov; D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-52447. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885.

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Phone:
541-963-3161

Toll free (Oregon):
1-800-781-3214

Email:
news@lagrandeobserver.com

POSTMASTER
Send address changes to:
The Observer,
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STAFF

Regional publisher.....Karrine Brogitti

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