

My Voice

# Your vote is the key to democracy

“Voting is the beating heart of democracy” are words attributed to Thomas Paine. Paine and his fellow founders were intent in making sure our fledgling country would never become the type of European-style monarchy they and their ancestors had left behind. How best to accomplish that? Allow citizens to vote for their leaders and provide for a peaceful transfer of power. This seems obvious enough today, although it was a radical proposition at the time.

While the earliest implementation of representative democracy in the United States was not perfect, it was still an improvement over the other political systems in the world then. Over the decades and centuries, our country has expanded voting rights to include non-land owners, women and racial minorities. There



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is still work to do, notably reforming the Electoral College, which has been responsible for electing the loser of the popular vote twice in the last 22 years.

There are several major problems with the Electoral College. First, it gives voters in little states more power than voters in big states. For example, in the Electoral College, each individual vote in Wyoming counts nearly four times as much in as each individual vote in Texas (according to The Center for Voting and Democracy). So much for “one person, one vote.”

Also, the winner-take-all nature of the system not only throws away conservative votes in blue states, it encourages election fraud in the handful of battleground states where the popular vote count is likely to be close. If we had a national popular vote, President Donald Trump would not have made that fateful call to the Georgia secretary of state, stating, “I only need 11,000 votes” — 11,000 votes is a drop in the bucket for the national popular vote, but what was really at stake was all 16 of Georgia’s electoral votes, a significant proportion of what Trump needed to reach 270.

In the 2020 election, many states moved to expand voting access through mail-in voting. Those efforts resulted in a record 46% of Americans voting by mail and the highest participation rate of any national election since 1900. Anyone reading this column knows Oregon helped pioneer this concept and has been conducting elections exclusively by mail for more than 20 years. Mail-in voting has proven secure and economical, as well as convenient for the voter. For those who believe the 2020 election was somehow stolen due to mail-in ballots, consider how difficult it would be for you personally to cast even one double vote. Not only would it be virtually impossible, it would also be a federal crime punishable by up to five years in prison.

Trump is the only presidential candidate to refuse to concede defeat after all votes were counted and legal challenges resolved. His many falsehoods about mail-in voting, his ineffectual court challenges and his attempts at illegal interference have stress-tested our democratic institutions as never before. In the end, Republican-appointed judges and Republican state officials honored the democratic process and resisted Trump’s attempts to tamper with the will of the people. If you believe Trump was robbed, is it really so surprising that a sitting president with an approval rating of 40.3% on Election Day could lose a national election?

Despite the importance of the vote, many Republican legislators across the country are now more determined than ever to restrict their citizens’ ability to cast votes. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, so far in 2021, lawmakers in 33 states have created more than 165 bills to restrict voting. Although their purported goal is improving election integrity, voter fraud (as opposed to election fraud) is extremely rare in this country. There are numerous large studies that prove this. For example, The Washington Post published the results of an investigation in 2014 that found 31 credible incidents of voter fraud out of one billion ballots cast. Restricting voting access is a corrupt solution in search of a nonexistent problem.

The founders created a constitutional democracy for good reason. Our continued existence as a democratic nation depends on free and fair elections, as well as a peaceful transfer of power. Your vote is helping to keep democracy alive.

*Jon White is a retired technical writer living in La Grande.*

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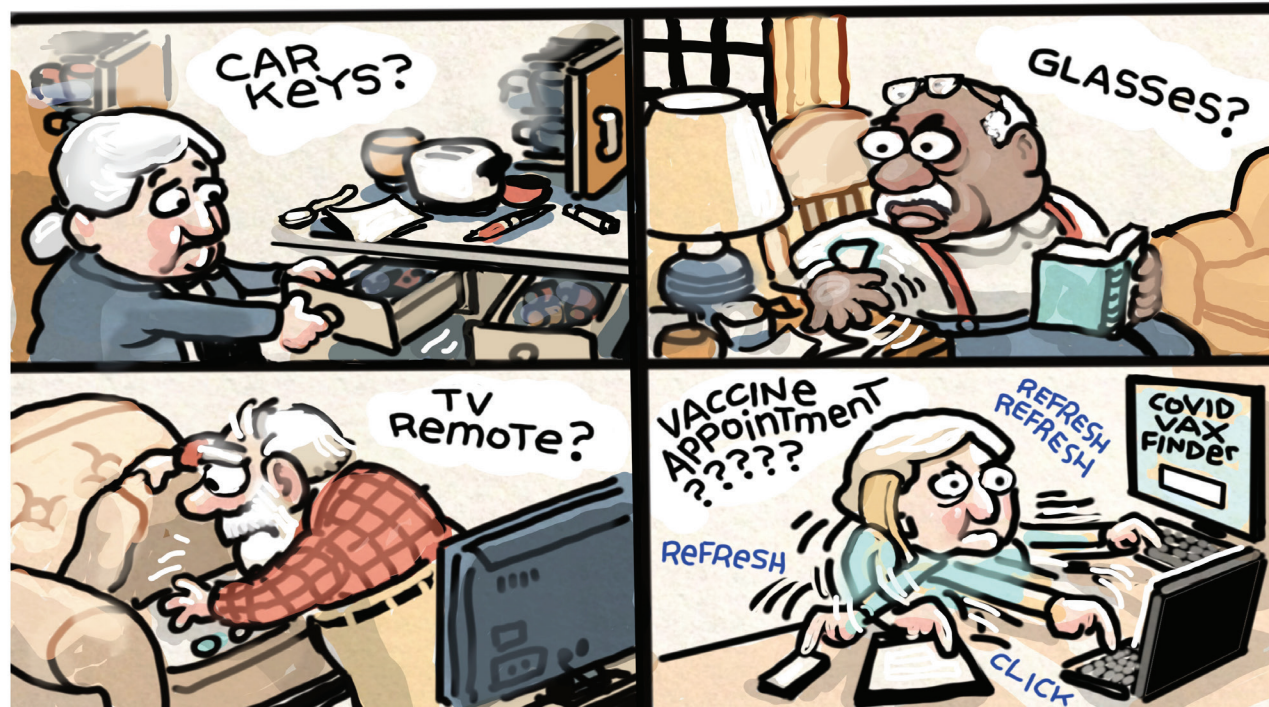
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## SENIOR MOMENTS ‘I-CAN’T-FIND’ EDITION



Other Views

# Pelosi wants to ruin 9/11-style Capitol commission before it begins

It is universally acknowledged the 9/11 Commission is the gold standard for after-event investigatory panels, an example of what can be accomplished when partisan political considerations are cast aside and the search for truth is an actual search for truth.

As the debate intensifies in Congress over creating a commission to examine the Jan. 6 assault on the U. S. Capitol, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi appears determined to turn the gold standard into fool’s gold.

Her insistence the proposed 11-member commission be dominated nearly 2 to 1 by Democratic appointees would seriously compromise the panel’s credibility before it begins, and deepen the divide between those who hold conflicting views of the events of Jan. 6.

Pelosi’s every decision is driven by her ego, an obsession with wielding power and a lust for political advantage. Her approach to the proposed study commission is consistent with that established pattern.

Public acceptance of the 9/11 commission report and the high degree of confidence in its findings was achieved by its bipartisan composition, including a former Republican governor, Thomas H. Kean of New Jersey, and a former Democratic congressman, Lee Hamilton of Ohio, serving as co-chairs.

Pelosi wants to ignore that history by placing seven Democratic appointees and four Republican ones on the commission as a hedge against any findings that differ from congressional Democrats’ preferred narrative that the riot was planned and executed by pro-Trump groups, egged on by the president to block congressional ratification of the Electoral College result.

As if to underscore the speaker’s plan for a desired result, Virginia Democratic Rep. Gerry Connolly proposed



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Republicans be denied commission membership altogether, alleging their votes against election certification disqualified them.

The proposed commission would be armed with a mandate to determine the origins of the storming of the Capitol, as well as provide answers for what seemed to be a remarkably ill-prepared law enforcement presence, allowing the building to be breached, property damaged, offices ransacked and members of Congress fleeing the chamber.

Not surprisingly, her partisan advantage scheme drew a vigorous negative response from Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, who saw it as an attempt to guarantee the commission reaches a pre-determined conclusion.

A handful of Democrats shared McConnell’s view, expressing concern that without equal representation, the commission’s findings would invite skepticism and fail to win public confidence that the truth behind the most serious civil assault on government in modern history had been laid bare.

McConnell suggested the proposed commission expand its purview and examine the protests that tore through American cities last summer.

Pelosi rejected it, insisting the focus remain exclusively on the storming of the Capitol and not be distracted by testimony or documentation of the violence, looting and arson that marked many of the protests in response to police misconduct and the deaths of Black men at the hands of law enforcement.

Should the creation of the commission be approved by Congress, Pelosi’s demand for a narrower focus will likely carry the day.

Neither the speaker nor most of the Democrats in Congress are eager to open a full-throated debate over the anti-police protests with which many of them sympathized. Moreover, they make a valid point that an insurrection against the seat of government is a far more serious matter than civil protests turned violent.

Should she remain adamant on the partisan tilt of the commission, though, Pelosi will be accused of torpedoing the idea, allowing the current narrative to stand — an insurrection abetted by Trump and carried out by a mob of his supporters.

In her political calculation, she emerges victorious either way: The commission will validate her pre-determined outcome or, if there is no commission, the blame will be Trump’s legacy.

Pelosi’s reputation as a major leaguer in the sport of political hardball has been well-earned, even when it fails spectacularly as it did in 2020, when her party absorbed a serious beatdown in the congressional elections, losing 15 House seats despite her persistent predictions of substantial Democratic gains.

Whether the horrific events of Jan. 6 are scrutinized by an independent commission is unclear at this point. In Pelosi’s hands, though, it is certain political benefit will take priority over the gold standard.

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Letters

### Let’s hear more from new sheriff on local racial justice

I enjoyed your Feb. 23, 2021, article about the changes to the Union County Sheriff’s Office under the direction of our new sheriff, Cody Bowen. I was very pleased to hear that Sheriff Bowen is “eager to find a way to help people suffering from mental illness,” which as you noted was one of the commitments of his campaign.

I would like to see your coverage of the sheriff’s office expanded to

address the theme raised by the brilliant seventh-grader Miri Koltuv and eloquently supported by Mary Helen Garoutte in recent letters to the editor. Specifically, how is the sheriff’s office addressing the national concerns raised about implicit bias among police personnel toward people of color?

For example, in the hiring process described in The Observer, is multicultural experience a job criterion? Are job candidates tested and/or scrutinized on the extent of their biases?

Will training be provided to current employees to ensure that people of color living in Union County or visitors to our community are not subject to different enforcement practices than would a white resident or visitor?

I look forward to seeing a future interview with Sheriff Bowen in The Observer and/or a direct statement from him on the opinion page.

*Patricia Kennedy  
Union*

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