

Other Views

# Redistricting is at the heart of democracy

It's not a bad thing that we're talking about election systems in the spring of an off-election year, even if the tenor of the discussion is (unsurprisingly) decidedly partisan.

The calmer times between elections are a good opportunity for a status check to review the most recent voting season and prepare for the next. It's also a time for any investigation into election fraud, which to date has been used as a bogeyman and rallying cry without the backing of credible evidence.

If any proof arises that elections were tampered with or our systems are vulnerable, we should all demand a response. But we should also be wary of those who continually float conspiracy theories about widespread fraud and hacked systems without being able to offer up more than suggestions of malfeasance.

The reason we're talking more generally about elections now is because of recent legislation passed in Georgia and the redistricting process here in Oregon. In Georgia, where Republicans control the state Legislature and secretary of state's office, Democrats are concerned about allowing the Legislature to have stronger influence on election systems.

The new Georgia election law comes with a host of measures with the purpose of protecting against fraud and expanding voter access. It's hard to take that description at face value, as most of the provisions make the act of voting more complicated and include strange provisions such as prohibiting giving food and water to people standing in line to vote. It also takes some power of election oversight from the secretary of state and gives it to the Legislature.

In Oregon, where Democrats control the state Legislature and secretary of state's office, Republicans are concerned about the redistricting process that will determine the layout of the Legislature and congressional representation for the next decade.

To be fair, in Oregon everyone is concerned about redistricting — or should be. The delays in census returns mean the decennial process will be abbreviated, potentially skipping the Legislature entirely and moving directly to the secretary of state.

Election integrity and voter access are fundamental principles that create a framework for democracy. If we can't agree on the rules, and extend some trust to one another, we won't have faith in the outcomes.

It starts with a level playing field. That means giving each voter a voice in the process and ensuring their ability to exercise that voice.

Voting districts are intended to group citizens into areas of common interest. This doesn't mean by political affiliation, and the prime examples of gerrymandering have been created by drawing lines around partisan voting blocks. There are a few fun simulators online that show how easy it is to turn a slim political advantage into a secure majority or spread influence across multiple districts to dilute a party's strength.

Because Oregon is poised to receive a sixth congressional seat, how that influence is distributed among individual voters is highly important. And how that influence is distributed among individual voters is highly important. This is on top of the 60 House and 30 Senate districts in the Oregon Legislature that will be redrawn.

As it stands, legislators won't be able to fulfill their duty of drawing these new district maps by July 1 because they won't have the updated U.S. Census data by then. Legislative leaders are working to find a compromise that allows their input before the process is constitutionally passed to the secretary of state. But regardless of the outcome, the development of new districts will be hurried ahead of the 2022 election cycle.

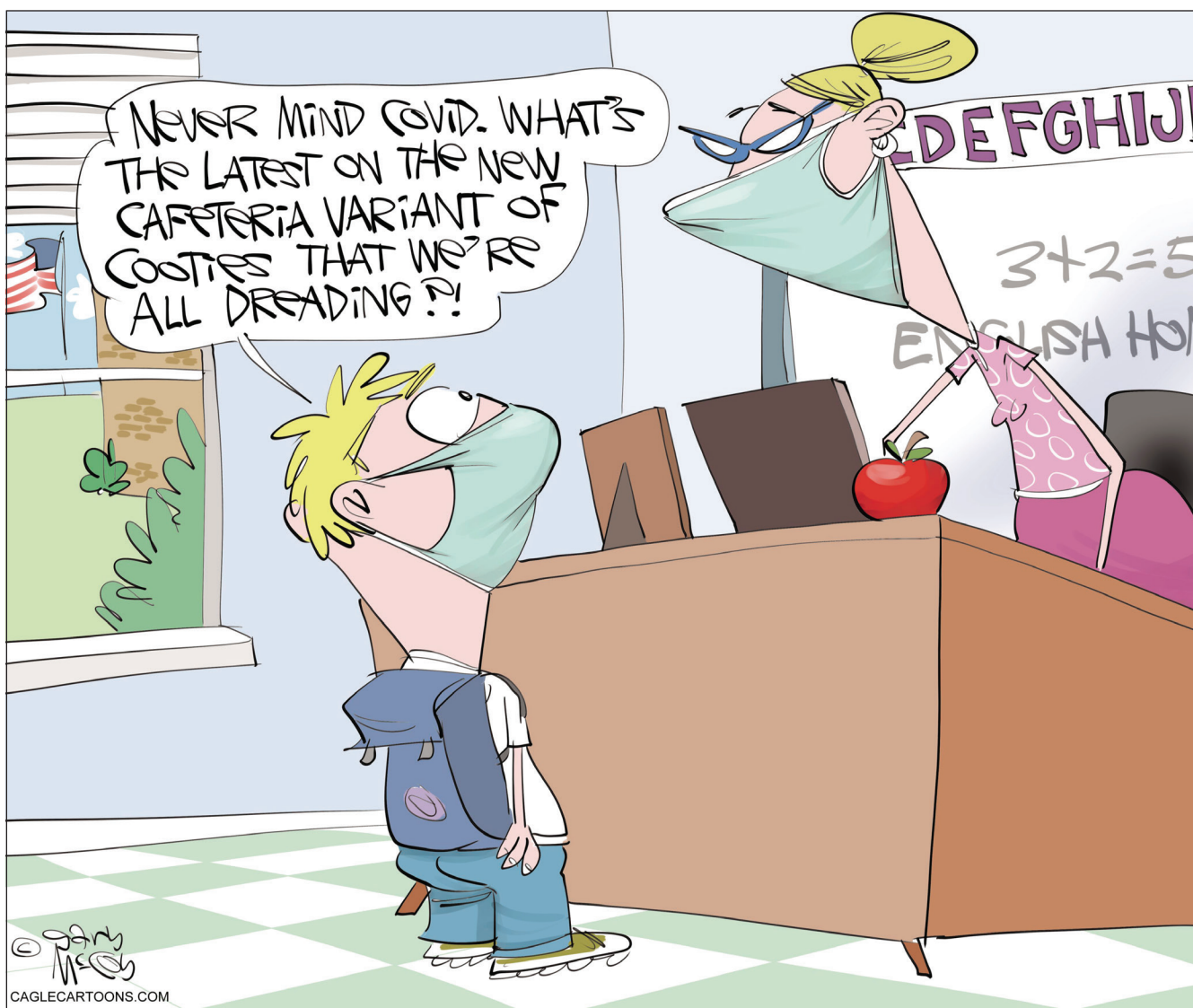
There's only so much we can do now, awaiting new population tallies and dealing with pressing matters like COVID-19 and wildfire recovery. But this is a good time to again reevaluate the balance of power between our elected legislators and our electorate in general.

We all benefit by clean and clear district maps. Allowing partisan politics to skew the creation of those maps erodes faith in the process and stifles voter turnout. Oregon is a blue state, but it hasn't always been and likely won't always be. The only way to make sure Oregonians — not political parties — are the ones setting the direction is to protect the redistricting process.

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Our View

# Voters need to remain engaged in legislative activity

The Oregon Legislature is poised to approve yet another gun mandate, and while the battle lines over such issues are clearly drawn, the real lesson for voters is they must remain involved and watchful of the actions of their elected lawmakers.

Late last month, the Oregon Senate voted to approve a bill to ban guns in the Capitol and other state buildings. Senate Bill 554 also would end the exemption that now allows concealed handgun license holders to carry their firearms in those buildings. It also would allow local governments to enact their own bans and increase the cost of a CHL.

A new bill — House Bill 2510 — will require the storage of firearms with triggers of cable locks inside a locked container or gun room.

Input on the bill is, as expected, evenly divided. That may be the only positive element

to this piece of legislation — there is no ambiguity about how people feel about it.

It is difficult to see how such a bill — which essentially reaches into a resident's private home — will withstand a court challenge on at least two specific constitutional pillars, but chances are it will gain approval.

Anti-gun bills and other pieces of legislation that tackle cultural flashpoint issues are going to be the norm going into the future, and that means every voter must do all they can to stay apprised of the ambitions and workings of their elected leaders.

In this day and age that is no easy task. Especially with the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the past there was a robust system — including the media and other watchdog groups — that kept citizens informed about legislative action. The media landscape, though, has changed. The number of reporters that

cover the Oregon Capitol isn't as large as it once was and that can be traced to economics. That means it is up to every voter to ensure they are following what is going on at the Legislature.

Thankfully, there are ways to keep tabs on our lawmakers. The internet is probably the easiest way to do so, and the Oregon Legislature's website is informative and offers a list of bills viewers can easily access.

The world is a bigger place now. Stories, events, are occurring all the time and often take center stage over what can be viewed as boring news out of a legislative session.

But it isn't boring. At least not when it comes to certain pieces of legislation that can impact us all. That is why it is so important for voters to stay informed and remain focused on what is going on at the Legislature.

That is the obligation every voter has.

## Letters

### Union County needs a bottle drop

I would like to propose Union County get a BottleDrop, BottleDrop Express or bottle return center. There are a number of them in Oregon already, mostly on the west side of the state.

I was able to see a BottleDrop Express and how it works, and was amazed at how easy it is to return cans and bottles. It seems to be a win-win situation for everyone. It removes the responsibility of bottle return areas from store owners, including the expense of hiring employees to maintain and clean those areas, and allows customers to easily return their cans and bottles.

I've observed local grocery stores and retail stores bottle return areas and shared the frustration of store owners having to purchase return machines, then trying to maintain the machines at their own expense, and also shared the frustration as a customer trying to return bottles in areas that aren't maintained or kept clean at no fault of the owner or customer; it's the obvious issue of a return center.

Diane Deal  
Elgin

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