

Oregon House OKs election-day postmark for ballots

By PETER WONG
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon, the first state to conduct all elections by mail, would join the ranks of states accepting ballots postmarked by election day under a bill that has cleared the Oregon House.

House Bill 3291 was approved on a 39-21 vote Monday, May 24, and goes to the Senate.

The bill would align Oregon with 17 states — including Washington, California and Nevada — that allow ballots to count if they are postmarked by election day. Four other states count ballots if they are postmarked the day before the election. Oregon is among the states that have required ballots to be in the hands of county elections offices by the close of election day.

Under the bill, ballots would have to arrive in county elections offices no later than seven days after the election if they are to count. States that allow election-day postmarks range from three to 20 days.

Rep. Dan Rayfield, a Democrat from Corvallis and the bill's floor manager, said about 150 voters in Marion County cast ballots in last year's general election, but they did not count



Pamplin Media Group, File

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because they were received after election day.

He said the concept of election-day postmarks has been on the table for two decades.

Rep. Greg Smith, a Republican from Heppner who then was in his first term, voted for it in 2001 and now. The only other Republican who voted for it Monday was Rep. Ron Noble of McMinnville. The other 21 Republicans voted against it.

"It creates another level of complexity in a system that is problematic," House Republican Leader Christine Drazen of Canby said. "A deadline is a deadline is a deadline."

Drazen also said the U.S. Postal Service has shifted

most of its mail processing to Portland in the two decades since the 2001 vote.

She also questioned a provision that allows a ballot to be counted even if the postmark is unclear.

Rayfield said that when a voter signs the return envelope containing a ballot, it will include a statement that the ballot was mailed on or before election day. If a voter does otherwise, it is considered perjury, a Class C felony punishable by a maximum fine of \$125,000 and five years in prison.

Secretary of State Shemia Fagan, the state's chief elections officer, endorsed an election-day deadline in testimony to the House Rules Committee on Feb. 11.

New wolf killing laws prompt push to revive protections

By MATTHEW BROWN
Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. — Wildlife advocates pressed the Biden administration on Wednesday, May 26, to revive federal protections for gray wolves across the Northern Rockies after Republicans-backed laws in Idaho and Montana made it much easier to kill the predators.

The Center for Biological Diversity, Humane Society and Sierra Club filed a legal petition asking Interior Secretary Deb Haaland to use her authority to return thousands of wolves in the region to protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Republican lawmakers in Idaho and Montana pushed through legislation in recent weeks that would allow hunters and trappers to kill unlimited numbers of wolves using tactics such as shooting from ATVs and helicop-

ters, using night-vision scopes and setting lethal snares that some consider inhumane.

Wolves in the region lost federal endangered protections in 2011 under an act of Congress after the species had rebounded from widespread extermination last century.

Hundreds of wolves are now killed annually by hunters and trappers in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming. Yet the population remains strong — more than 3,000 animals, according to wildlife officials — because the wolves breed so successfully and can roam huge areas of wild land in the sparsely populated Northern Rockies.

Supporters of restoring protections say the new laws will tip the scales and drive down wolf numbers to unsustainable levels, while also threatening packs in Wyoming

and other nearby states that have interconnected populations.

They argue the changes violated the terms that allowed state management of wolves, and want Haaland to act before the looser hunting rules start going into effect in Idaho on July 1.

"The (U.S. Fish and Wildlife) Service was very clear that a change in state law that allowed for unregulated, unlimited take of wolves would set off the alarm," said attorney Nicholas Arrivo with the Humane Society of the United States. "This is essentially an attempt to push the population down to the very minimum."

Wednesday's petition seeks to restore protections across all or portions of at least six states — Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, eastern Washington, eastern Oregon and a small area of Northern Utah.

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What to know before claiming Social Security benefits

Hardworking adults spend years striving to achieve their professional goals. Along the way, planning for retirement is a way to ensure all that hard work pays off when the time comes to call it a career.

In the United States, men and women nearing retirement age may be thinking about when they should begin collecting their Social Security retirement benefits. Social Security is a social insurance program instituted by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1935. The program consists of retirement, disability and survivor benefits, and workers in the United States contribute to Social Security each week.

The decision about when to claim Social Security retirement benefits is one all those who have contributed to the program must eventually make. In recognition of the difficulty of that decision, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau offers the following tips to people wondering when they should begin collecting their Social Security benefits.

- Confirm your full retirement age. Full retirement age refers to the age at which people can begin collecting their full benefits. Depending on the year you were born, you can begin collecting your full benefit at age 66 or 67. Claiming your benefit before you reach full retirement age will lead to a permanent decrease in your monthly benefits. Conversely, claiming after you reach full retirement age will lead to a permanent increase in your monthly benefits. Since the stakes are so considerable, it's vital for adults to confirm their full retirement age before they claim their benefits.

- Delay claiming if you can. The CFPB notes that you can expect to get an additional 5 to 8 percent in monthly benefits for every year you wait to claim your Social Security benefits after age 62, maxing out at age 70. If you can afford to do so,

wait to claim your full benefit until age 70, as doing so can translate to a benefit that's 32 percent higher than it would have been had you claimed your benefit at age 62.

- Budget for retirement. Short- and long-term budgeting for retirement can help you assess how much money you will need to cover your expenses when you stop working. This step can help you understand how much a reduced or increased Social Security benefit will affect your bottom line in retirement.

- Continue working. Remaining in the workforce full-time or even part-time can have a considerable impact on the size of your Social Security benefit. The CFPB notes that continuing to work for one or two additional years can replace low- or no-income earnings from your earnings record, thereby increasing your benefit.

- Consider the long-term needs of your spouse. Surviving spouses receive the higher of the two spouses' benefits. So it makes sense for the higher earning spouse to wait to collect

The decision about when to claim Social Security retirement benefits is one all those who have contributed to the program must eventually make.

his or her benefit until he or she reaches full retirement age. The decision about when to collect your Social Security benefit is complex. Discussing your options with your spouse and financial advisor can help you make the most informed decision.

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