

OUR VIEW

# Voter turnout was surprising but welcome

Oregon's voter turnout exceeded expectations during the recent gubernatorial primary and that should be good news to all voters.

However, we need to do better. More than 1 million ballots were cast in the recent primary elections and that shows we, as a state, do care about what our political future will look like, but more voters still need to get involved in every one of the state's elections. Democracy is an institution ideally suited for good governance but it can only do so, can only function at its highest level, if those who live under that democracy participate.

Participation in elections — especially off-year presidential contests — never shows a steady line of progress but instead dips and climbs depending on the year, the generation or the major issues of the time.

We as Americans tend to get involved in politics during critical periods of our history and then slowly fade into the background when there doesn't appear to be a crucial problem to solve or to overcome.

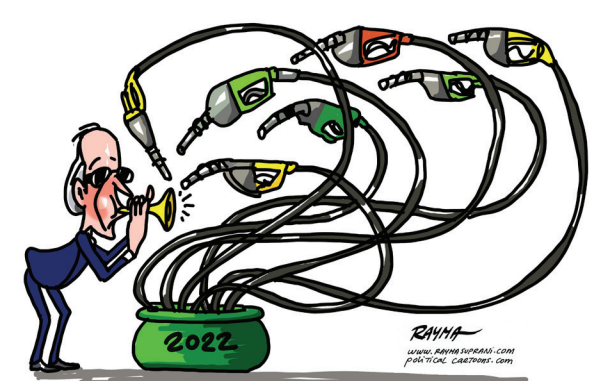
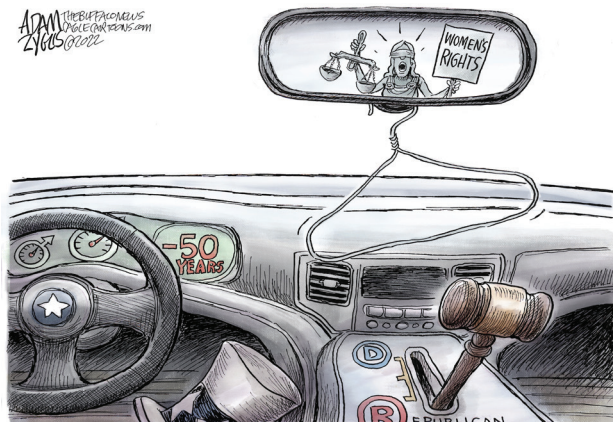
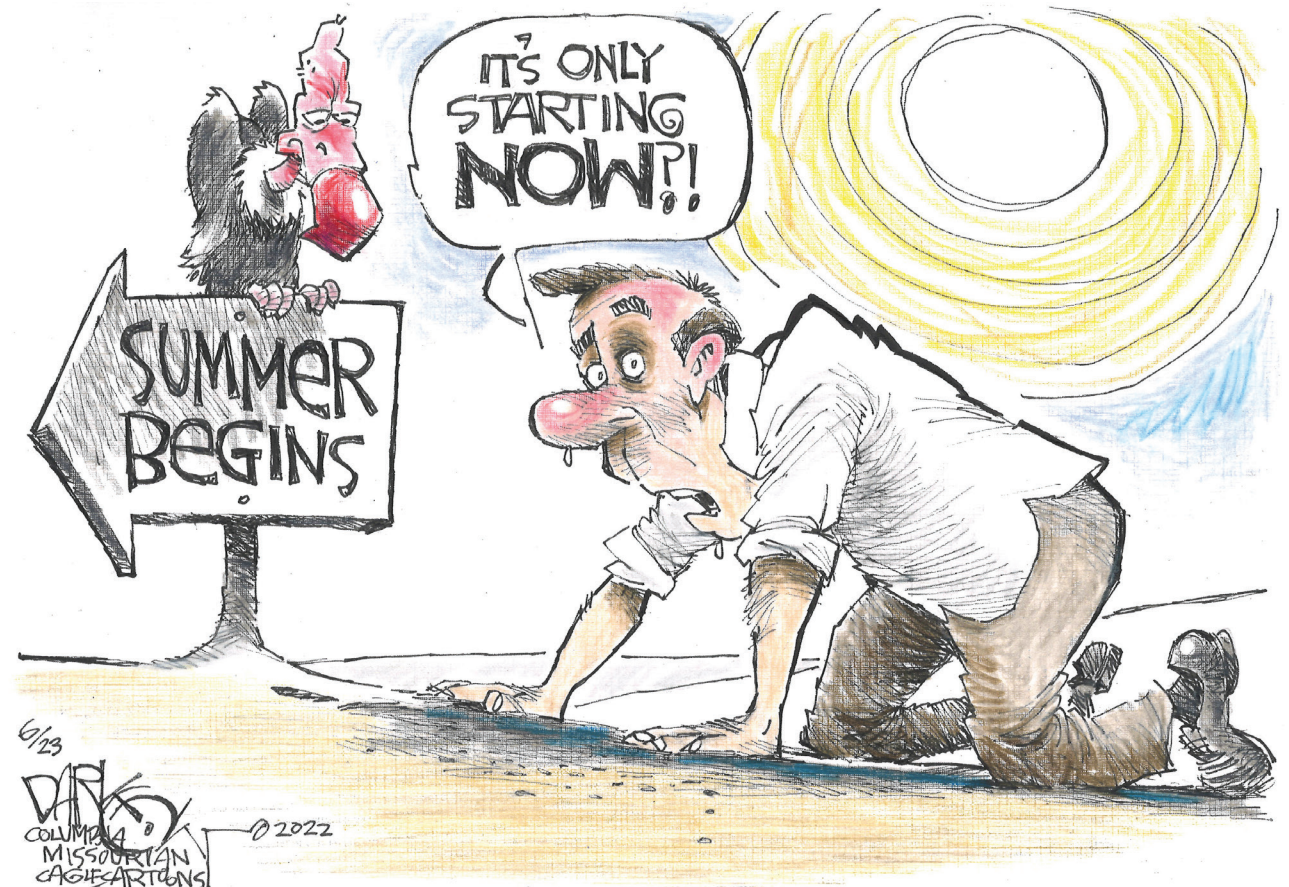
There are probably a host of reasons why voter participation dips and rises, and any one of them could go a long way in explaining the lack of involvement. The advent of social media — where we become more and more isolated into our political silos — certainly hasn't helped, but all of our woes cannot be laid at the feet of technological advances.

Regardless of the current state of technology, every voter holds a sacred responsibility to become involved with democracy during an election.

The franchise to vote is a hard-earned privilege bestowed upon us by the sacrifice of countless others in our conflicts that trace back more than 200 years. To ignore the benefits of that franchise is to subtly disregard the price so many in our armed forces paid for us to continue to practice democracy.

One vote does matter. So do thousands. One vote can also make a difference.

More people voting in the gubernatorial primaries than expected is excellent news for our democracy at every level. Let's just hope such commitment to democracy continues.



OTHER VIEWS

## Current private health insurance system fails us

I am grateful to The Observer for its June 23 editorial outlining the benefits of the plan being proposed by the Joint Task Force on Universal Health Care. The plan would provide expanded benefits, better care and lower overall costs for the majority of Oregonians. It would also provide freedom from medical debt and bankruptcy for all Oregonians.

In an article published in the May 5 edition of The Observer, we learned that Oregonians' personal spending for health care rose by 34% from 2013 to 2019, a rate higher than the national average. Nearly a quarter of the average Oregon family's spending was going toward health care costs. These high costs jeopardize the financial stability of Oregonians and prevent people, even those with private health insurance, from seeking needed care.

The June 23 editorial states that a state governing board having oversight of a universal health care plan may not be welcome by individuals who do not like the idea of the government taking over a service provided by the private sector. I would assert that the private health insurance industry has never had the best interest of the insured as its primary focus. The primary goal of private health insurance companies is to make a profit and that is accomplished by charging ever-increasing premiums, deductibles and co-pays as well as denying care to the insured.

A universal health care system ensures that all Oregonians will have access to medical care when needed. The ability to choose my own health care provider, and freedom from the constraints imposed by a private insurance company determining what care I receive and where I receive it, often at odds with my medical provider, are freedoms I look forward to.

I will gladly pay reasonable taxes to support a universal health care plan as opposed to paying exorbitant premiums, deductibles and copays that

often lead to crushing debt. No one's financial well-being should be put at risk because of illness or injury. The current private health insurance system is failing us. Now is the time to institute universal health care.

Anna Maria Dill  
La Grande

## 21-inch rule no longer protects big old trees

Mark Webb's harsh rebuttal of Rob Klavins' essay on forest collaboratives certainly proves one of Klavins' points: The collaboratives are quick to crush any dissent.

I was a member of the Wallowa-Whitman Collaborative (now the Northern Blues Forest Collaborative) but left after realizing decisions were biased toward extraction rather than responsible forest management.

I attended a Wallowa-Whitman briefing on the proposed Morgan-Nesbit project and viewed proposed cuts. This is nominally a restoration project, but the examples I was shown included aggressive logging of big old trees in previously uncut backcountry forests.

The 21-inch "Eastside Screens" rule no longer protects big trees, contrary to what Webb says, because the rule was weakened and changed from a standard to an unenforceable guideline. Furthermore, logging projects of 16,000 acres (recently in the Fremont-Winema NF) are happening as Categorical Exclusions that sidestep Environmental Impact Statements and significant environmental review.

Labeling big trees as hazards has become a consistent tactic in justifying a return to logging big timber. Huge ponderosa, hundreds of years old, were cut along the Imnaha River under this rubric and others. Go count the rubrics.

This tactic was used on the Big Mosquito project where big trees near the lift cable route and landing were cut down after being labeled hazardous. Cable lifts are planned elsewhere in the Big Mosquito cut. If they don't try to stop it, the collaboratives

are complicit. I believe there is a public consensus that big old trees be conserved, for environmental and ethical reasons. The Forest Service skirts this consensus by disingenuous labeling and collaborative support. Perhaps in Big Mosquito saving big trees should have priority over extraction. If the logging can't be done without cutting old growth, those units should be dropped.

Forest collaboratives are enabling the Forest Service to log old-growth timber.

Wally Sykes  
Joseph

## Universal health care wouldn't wipe out private insurance

The Observer, June 23, 2022, Our View "Being up-front about cost of universal health care" declared that much of the private health care insurance industry in Oregon and jobs associated with it would likely be wiped out as a result of the Oregon Universal Health Plan.

My fact checking does not support this statement. In fact, the June 2022 Oregon Joint Task Force's Universal Health Plan Proposal (find the link at [www.oregon.gov/oha/HPA/HP/Pages/Task-Force-Universal-Health-Care.aspx](http://www.oregon.gov/oha/HPA/HP/Pages/Task-Force-Universal-Health-Care.aspx)) includes a section on private health care insurance, including:

- Insurers would have a more limited role than in the current system.
- Insurers would be able to offer extra insurance to cover benefits or services not offered by the Universal Health Plan. This could include certain prescription drugs or long-term care.

• The Universal Health Plan might also contract with third parties, such as private insurance carriers, to help with administration.

Given the work to date, I trust implementation of the Universal Health Plan will include the issue of the health care insurance industry.

Cheryl Simpson  
La Grande

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