

OUR VIEW

Elections are crucial to a democracy

Oregon voters may well secure one of those rare election moments in November when they can choose from three different candidates but the key, as always, is that all residents take advantage of the opportunity to vote.

That may prove to be quite a challenge, though we hope not.

Now, three candidates — Betsy Johnson, Tina Kotek and Christian Drazen — are vying for the state's top political position.

Kotek is on the Democratic ticket while Drazen is the GOP front-runner. Johnson, who is unaffiliated with any party, recently turned in enough signatures to get a spot on the Nov. 8 election ballot.

While there will be plenty of bombast and wide sweeping proclamations by all the candidates between now and November, what is really key about the election is that enough Oregonians vote.

The right to vote is more than just a nice, quaint concept about America. It is the key element to our Democracy.

Multitudes of people have died on distant battlefields for us to enjoy that right. Many brave souls during the Civil Rights era marched and faced danger to ensure everyone held the ability to vote.

As voters we owe them all a great debt, but if we do not use what is the key tool of our democracy then our very future is at risk.

Sure, at least for now there isn't a whole lot of variety within the candidates. Kotek is as solidly Democrat as Drazen is Republican. Johnson is trying to capitalize on her role as a political outlier to get elected.

In other words, this election doesn't appear to be one that will be needlessly complicated. The battle lines are drawn. The issue is familiar. Now all that needs to happen is that eligible voters actually vote.

Regardless of what one reads or hears, every vote does count. We, as Americans, enjoy a specific ability to peacefully complete a process that selects those who will represent us during every election. Our privilege to vote — and it is a privilege — is only as effective as those who chose to use it.

We must guard against apathy and the dissonance created by modern day pop culture and political sound bites to focus on exercising our right to vote.

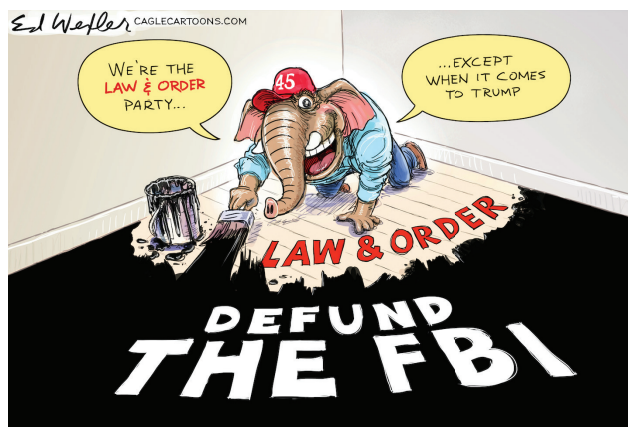
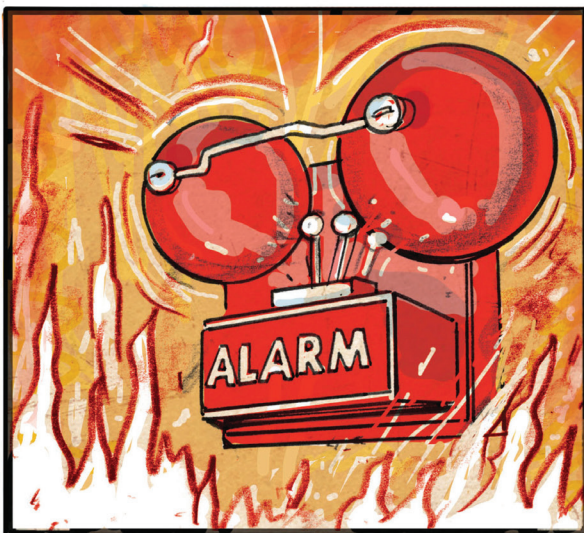
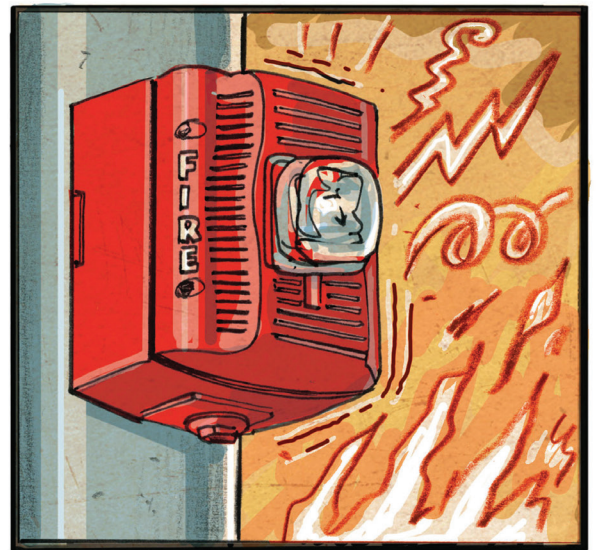
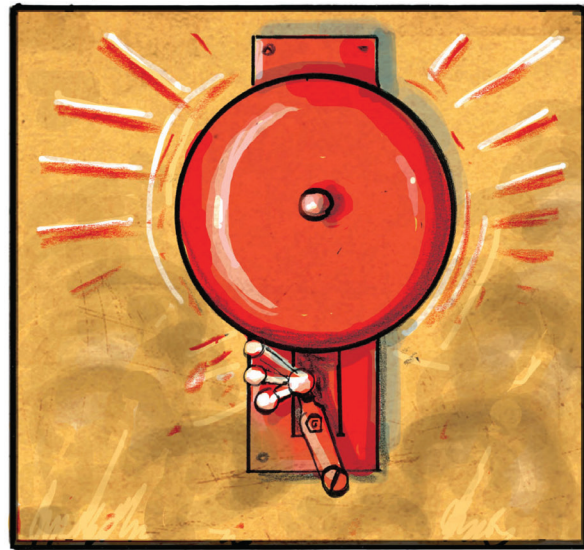
The state faces many challenges, no doubt about it. Yet we have the opportunity to do something about those challenges by voting. Every election is crucial in a democracy. Let's not allow our great privilege to be wasted.

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VA shows pitfalls of government health care



SALLY C. PIPES
OTHER VIEWS

In the fall of 2020, a patient in Augusta, Georgia, went to the local Veterans Affairs medical center for a minimally invasive urologic surgery, according to a new report from the VA's Office of Inspector General.

Less than two weeks later, the patient died. The Inspector General concluded that there had been "multiple deficiencies" in the patient's care. Among them, his doctor allegedly failed to account for his history of chest infections and alcoholism.

Sadly, this is just one of countless examples of the VA's failure to provide adequate care. And it shows why proposals to nationalize U.S. health care — like Senator Bernie Sanders's bill to establish Medicare for All, which he reintroduced in May — are bad news.

Every six months, the VA's Inspector General submits a report to Congress on the agency's performance. And every six months, the story is the same: gross incompetence, fraud, long wait times and

substandard care.

The OIG's most recent report, which covered October 2021 to March 2022, identified more than \$4 billion in "monetary impact" — waste, questionable spending, fraud and the like. Investigations into offending behavior led to more than 100 arrests for crimes that included wire fraud and bribery. One Louisiana doctor had received more than \$650,000 in kickbacks from a medical supply company.

But while the waste and criminality are galling, the patient stories are worse.

A veteran who sought treatment and eventually died at a VA center in New Mexico waited 175 days for a CT scan for possible lung cancer, according to the OIG. Then, even though the results showed signs of cancer, the patient did not receive a follow-up biopsy. The patient eventually received a conclusive cancer diagnosis at a non-VA hospital.

The OIG also reported on a patient who died 17 days after being discharged from a VA medical center in Gainesville, Florida, after a 33-day hospital stay. The Inspector General concluded that the facility "failed to develop a discharge plan that adequately ensured patient safety and continuity of care."

Even patients not in imminent danger face the stress of extremely long waits. At the VA clinic in Anaheim, California, at the beginning of June, new patients could expect to wait 29 days for an appointment. At the three clinics in Jacksonville, Florida, the average wait in early June was 52 days. And at one clinic in Fayetteville, North Carolina, earlier this month, it was 96 days.

None of this should be especially surprising. Long waits and sloppy care characterize single-payer health care all over the world.

Canadians face a median wait of more than 25 weeks for treatment from a specialist following referral by their general practitioner, according to the Fraser Institute, a Canadian think tank. Such delays have serious consequences. Second-Street.org, another Canadian think tank, found that over 11,500 Canadian patients died while waiting for surgeries, procedures, or diagnostic scans between 2020 and 2021.

Canada and the VA offer a glimpse of the subpar treatment, needless suffering, and rampant fraud and abuse we can expect under Medicare for All.

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