

Anti-immigration proposals unworthy of Oregon

Hate speech has always been a part of our public discourse, but this year it seems to swell with added oomph, energized by a foul whiff of validation from our national electoral debates.

It gets tempered for the more liberal palate and dog-whistled for the masses, but it's still there.

This year, as in years past, immigration

is the boogeyman of choice.

Oregon is no exception when it comes to the rash of efforts to freeze out immigrants, particularly those who are undocumented – which is a lowly civil offense, by the way; not a crime.

There are three such initiatives trying to make their way toward the November ballot. They span voting rights, employment opportunities and government communications. You will probably be hearing more about them on the streets of Portland as the petition season ramps up.

While anti-immigrant measures are unlikely to pass in Multnomah County, if they make it to the ballot they will be voted on by all Oregonians. In 2014, Oregon voters killed Measure 88, with 66 percent voting to deny undocumented immigrants drivers licenses.

Listen carefully to what the pitch is really about.

Let's start with the issue of communication. One initiative proposal would allow Oregon governments to use only English in their communications. Currently there are local, state and federal requirements surrounding language usage by government. We live in a vibrant multi-national city, made all the better for its mix of cultures and diversity, and language is one of the purest forms of culture. Learning a new one can take years.

This language proposal addresses no problem. Rather it is designed to shut out people from civic affairs. It seeks to foster division, confusion and alienation among Oregonians. But they probably won't say that when they ask for your signature.

Equally nonsensical is an initiative proposal to make voters prove their citizenship before casting their ballots, with the idea of preventing voter fraud.

It's well documented that what voter fraud actually does exist isn't being perpetrated by individuals – the voters – but by people in power. Voters have been purged from the rolls wholesale in recent elections, most recently in Brooklyn, where hundreds had their votes dropped from the count.

This initiative isn't just an issue of

citizenry, it's an issue of voter suppression. And it vilifies immigrants as culprits in a virtually nonexistent crime.

But perhaps the most nefarious measure is the one requiring all businesses to use the federal program E-Verify to determine a worker's employment eligibility. It's basically a massive list of every eligible worker in the United States, along with their personal information, such as Social Security number, address, work history, etc. Run by the federal government, it's a bureaucratic behemoth and a hacker's wet dream.

Moreover, E-Verify is a cumbersome program that would be a burden on small businesses. And with its reported rate of error, it could be a devastating obstacle for an otherwise eligible worker if their name comes up as a "nonconfirmation."

Regardless, an additional hoop won't mean anything for the businesses already not following laws and hiring undocumented workers.

Across the state, organizations have come together to speak out against these measures, including the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon.

"These proposals are the latest attempts to use the politics of hate and fear

mongering to pit Oregonian against Oregonian," said David Rogers, executive director of ACLU of Oregon.

Our cover story features the people who are getting their U.S. citizenship – many after decades of living and working in the United States. There are many reasons for the delay, but this year, they're seeing another reason to push forward. Instead of being frozen out, they are working to use politics against fear.

One out of 10 Oregonians are foreign-born immigrants, and more than one-third of them are already naturalized citizens, according to the American Immigration Council.

Like any selection of our population they are an economic powerhouse with billions of dollars worth of consumer muscle and business enterprise.

Let's stop treating people – friends, neighbors and coworkers – like they are the enemy. That goes for people who are in poverty, for people who are struggling, for people who are breaking the molds and challenging the status quo.

"Embracing the values on inclusivity and diversity are an essential ingredient to ensuring Oregon can thrive," said Rogers.

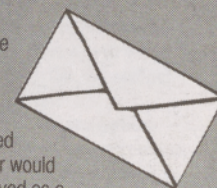
We all know this. So let's dispense with the anti-immigration platform. It is, after all, fundamentally anti-American.

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— DAVID ROGERS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
OF ACLU OF OREGON

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