

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



GROUND GAME

THE ROAD TO NOVEMBER 6, 2012
BY NANCY WEBBER

READY, SET, STOP THE VOTE

Voter ID laws have had their intended affect

Barack Obama won in 2008 because volunteers registered record numbers of voters and those voters went to the polls. Since then 31 states have passed restrictive voter ID laws, ostensibly to prevent voter fraud. Early voting now requires an excuse in Kentucky. Same-day registration was ended in Maine. Ohio stopped Sunday voting and prohibited election boards from mailing absentee ballot requests to voters. Locations to vote have been cut in targeted precincts in Colorado. I don't think even God is eligible to vote in Pennsylvania.

When I recently arrived in south Florida, I was trained and certified to register voters. Among my first prospects was a middle-aged man who voted in 2008, but whose registration had been purged from the roles this year. There was a look of defeat in his eyes. More than 20 years ago he served time for possession of marijuana — a felony back then — and this rejection seemed to remind him of how hard it is to move past something we now would consider a minor offense.

He may face a lengthy process to have his rights restored, a predicament created when Gov. Rick Scott reinstated a lifetime voting restriction on all felons. The rule had first been revised and then eliminated by his predecessors, Jeb Bush and Charlie Crist.

In 11 states, including Florida, many of the most restrictive provisions of the new laws have been overturned or postponed by the courts in the past few weeks, but the damage has been done. Many people are afraid to vote. Others are just too bewildered or discouraged to sort through their states' requirements.

Yet there is a quiet determination among the people I meet. They proudly show me their voter registration cards, cards that look as though they have lasted longer than several wallets. People tell me that they have been voting for 20 to 30 years.

And they want to know, "Is everything is OK?"

They are understandably worried.

I am working in one of the five Florida counties still under the jurisdiction of the 1965 Voting Rights Act for having denied access to the ballot "on account of race, color or membership in a language minority."

When I ask people if they have moved, changed their names due to marriage, changed parties or voted recently enough to avoid a purge for inactive voters, they willingly fill out new forms and then anxiously wait for two to three weeks for a new card. I am beginning to hear from people I met when I first arrived three weeks ago who have yet to receive theirs.

These efforts at vote suppression are coordinated and intentionally targeted toward the young and the old, students, servicemen and women, the poor and minority voters. Vote suppression is one way to win an election, but it isn't democracy.

Some view it as a game between Republicans and Democrats — how many voters can be disenfranchised through these suppression tactics versus how many can be newly registered?

This isn't a game to me. I come from a mixed-race family. On my family tree are many who were denied the right to vote. My great grandmother, who walked to Oregon as a child in 1864, made her first and only vote for president after women were given the right in 1920. She died in 1923. My sister-in-law spent part of her childhood in a Japanese internment camp during World War II. When the Exclusion Acts were rescinded between 1942 and 1952, her American-born parents were finally allowed their right to vote. For my Objibwe father — a World War II veteran — and Native Americans generally, voting became a universal right for the first time in 1948. The 1965 Voting Rights Act is presumed to have benefited mostly African Americans, who are also on my family tree, but it secured the right for all of us by making it a federal offense to deny people of any race, color or language minority access to the polls.

I have observed suppression laws in action from Colorado to Florida and witnessed the reactions of people that I've registered here in Florida. When newly registered voters sign their names, they take deep breaths and smile. For some it is a prisoner's release, an acknowledgement better than a birth certificate or a passport, of freedom. ■

Nancy Webber of Eugene is a longtime Oregon political activist and author of Ground Game, a new book that chronicles her time in the field offices of the 2008 Obama campaign. The book is available at Amazon Kindle, iBook, Kobo and Inkwater Press.

ILLEGAL DISPOSAL

"We conclude that the Fourth and 14th Amendments protect homeless persons from government seizure and summary destruction of their unabandoned, but momentarily unattended, personal property." In early September, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in *Lavan v. City of Los Angeles* that confiscating and destroying the personal property of the homeless constitutes unreasonable seizure. This ruling is legally binding upon the state of Oregon.

Last Tuesday (10/2), James Finn, a homeless man who sleeps on the river at Delta Ponds, left his belongings for a short period of time while attending to other business. Sometime in the early afternoon, a Lane County Sheriff's crew "cleaned up" his belongings and disposed of them in the county landfill, in violation of his constitutional rights as set forth in *Lavan*. Among the possessions seized were his bicycle, bike cart, tent, backpack, tarps and tools, and the flag that had been draped over his father's coffin at Arlington National Cemetery.

Finn spoke to several people at Parks and Open Space, who told him that it was their policy to confiscate and dispose of property that they find unattended in city parks. I learned of this situation Thursday afternoon, and on Friday I spoke to John Clark at Parks and Open Space, who told me that the department seizes and disposes belongings as current policy, that they knew nothing of the ruling, and that they were not told anything by the city and/or county regarding a change to the policy.

Why hasn't general counsel for the city and/or county informed the Parks Department that this behavior is unconstitutional? The court ruling made national news, and many in the activist/advocacy community are aware of it. Surely local government can't be ignorant of such a significant ruling. The facts and circumstances here are clear-cut. The Parks Department (and EPD) have no choice but to immediately refrain from seizing people's possessions. And in the case of seemingly abandoned possessions, the city needs to leave notice of seizure, adequately

store the seized possessions and allow the owners to come forth.

How will the city and county make amends for the violation of Mr. Finn's Fourth Amendment rights? As I see it, either the Sheriff's Department needs to start digging through the landfill, or the city and/or county need to adequately compensate him for the destruction of his possessions. Ignorance of the law is no excuse for violating Finn's constitutional rights.

This situation is completely unacceptable and needs to be immediately rectified. I look forward to hearing how local government plans on accomplishing that, and I expect that the parks policy will be immediately changed so that such blatant constitutional violations do not land the city in federal court.

Alley Valkyrie
Eugene

VISION DEFICIENCY

I moved to Eugene in 1991 because the people and elected leaders of Eugene and Lane County seem to have a vision of doing things that benefited the community, the working people within and the environment that surrounds us.

Around 1996, Eugene Mayor Jim Torrey and his puppet masters hijacked that vision by accommodating Hyundai to build a huge computer chip factory on endangered wetlands. Subsequent to that fateful decision the ruling elite and their puppets accommodated a Walmart, Target, Lowe's and Home Depot. A few years later, round two of mega-stores moved in.

This did not happen because the people of Lane County changed their vision. I attribute most if not all of the commodification and destruction of Eugene/Springfield's livability to the ruling elite of Lane County and our so-called elected leaders. Lane County's wealthiest families and our "elected leaders" seem to have been struck by a "vision deficient disorder." Their vision seems to be stuck in 1950. It seems they think that all the people need is strip malls, mega-stores, football and the wealth will trickle back up to them.

Eugene, Springfield and Lane County government actions of approving and con-