

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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## OUR VIEW

# State leaders can build on success of Motor Voter

Every state has its quirks, and some quirks come to define that state in the national consciousness.

Florida, for instance, is part retirement community, part Deep South, part Disney World, part Latino immigration hub and part swamp, with an annual hurricane or two. The other 49 states aren't sure exactly what to make of it.

Texas, which is not to be messed with, has an outlaw Western spirit and wide open spaces, but is also home to six of the 20 largest cities in the U.S.

California is the magnet for show business and tech development, Michigan is the sputtering frame of a once-great economic engine and Delaware is a state, too.

Oregon's place in the national consciousness is as a liberal testing ground for progressive policies, rooted in Portland's firm seat as the state's thought center.

Sometimes this doesn't work out. Promising our public employees a Rolls-Royce retirement package must have sounded great at the time, but it had long-term financial consequences. Every new iteration of the state's education plan, touting a better future for our students, seems to pan out as more style than substance.

### Initial success

But sometimes that striving for progress pays off. Oregon's innovative Motor Voter law, given its first real test drive this election, is an example of creative thinking that solves a real democratic problem. Given its initial success, we also believe Motor Voter can be tweaked to make it even better.

The state already allows everyone to vote by mail, a rarity in the country, and state legislators passed a measure in 2015 to automatically register residents through the Department of Motor Vehicles unless they specifically opt out. In essence, this means it's more difficult to opt out of getting a ballot for a general election than to register to receive one.

While lawmakers in other states have contrived ways to make voting more difficult, which always disproportionately affects poor and minority citizens, Oregon has made equal voter access a priority.

### Improvements

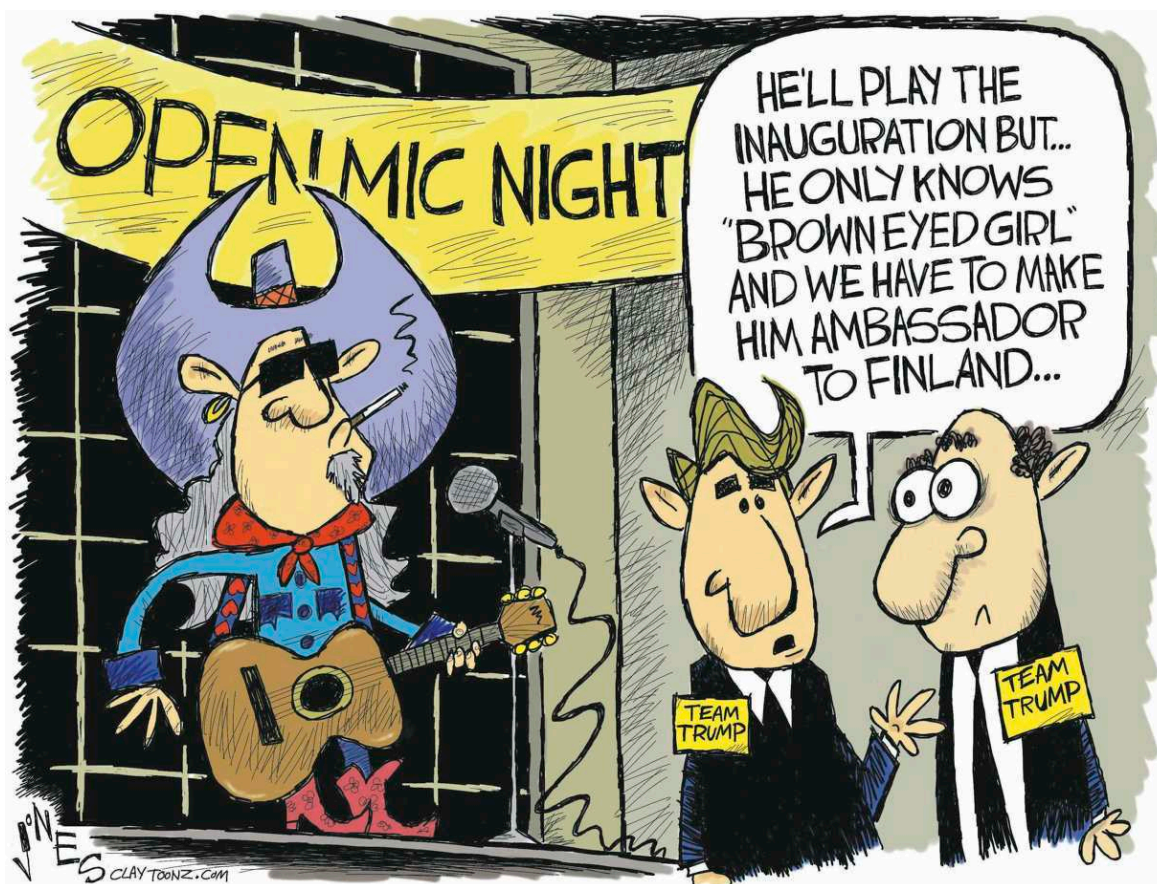
Creating even greater equal access is an area where the Motor Voter program can be improved. Oregonians who are registered through Motor Voter are automatically classified as nonaffiliated/other until they return a follow-up postcard from the state and re-register with a party affiliation. To date, 272,702 people have been registered through Motor Voter, and of those, 78 percent have remained nonaffiliated/other. Where the problem arises is that by remaining unaffiliated, those new voters are locked out of voting in partisan primary elections because of Oregon's closed primary system, and for practical purposes because of the demographic makeup of Oregon's state and county voting districts, many of the seats are decided in the primaries and are not contested in the general election.

Additionally, research shows that unaffiliated voters in Oregon account for 34 percent of the state's electorate, and that percentage has been trending upward for four decades. If the trend continues, unaffiliated voters will outnumber either Democrats or Republicans, which means fewer voters — rather than more voters — will be filling out ballots in those primaries and will have a potentially disproportionate influence on the outcome.

Greater efforts need to be made either at the initial registration point or in the follow-up to reach unaffiliated voters so that the closed primary system and the Motor Voter registration system are working in sync for all elections rather than just the general election. Another possible alternative is changing the primary system from closed to open primaries. State lawmakers should study both options and work to get the most inclusive result.

Oregon had 97,000 new voters cast ballots in the general election this year, about 44 percent of those registered through the new law. That's a lot of people newly enfranchised in a cornerstone of our democracy. That engagement, while maybe a drop in the bucket in the wider scheme of, say, the presidential election outcome, can have a great effect on statewide and certainly local politics.

A state can't choose its reputation on a whim. Or-E-gawn will always be seen as full of tree-hugging hippies if you ask a random resident of Florida, Texas, California, Michigan or Delaware. But by proving automatic voter registration can work in the best possible way, we'll give those other states a reason to again follow our lead.



## GUEST COLUMN

# 10 ways to make more mindful charitable gifts

By MAX WILLIAMS  
*Special to The Daily Astorian*

If you're a community-minded person, it's easy to be overwhelmed with solicitations for financial support from worthy nonprofit organizations, especially at the end of the year. Being as thoughtful and intentional about personal and business philanthropy as you are about your own finances is a step in the right direction.



Here are some charitable giving ideas I recommend keeping in mind as you delve into your philanthropy this month. And, despite what bookkeepers or certified public accountants might cheerfully counsel, I try to think of the tax deductibility of my own personal gifts as an added bonus, not a primary motivation.

### 1. Ask yourself the key questions

What's a realistic budget for charitable contributions? And, given my current and likely future available resources, where do I think I can make the greatest impact?

### 2. Don't wait for organizations (and causes) to find you

Do some homework to evaluate the vision and effectiveness of groups you're considering, then connect with them in ways that make the most sense. Sometimes, it's good to link with organizations that align directly with your work or your hobbies. That's why home improvement retailers have supported Habitat for Humanity and why tech firm owners give hardware and software to schools and colleges. You'll be far more invested in their success if you pick the right partners.

### 3. Determine the best sources of information

Charity Navigator and GuideStar are two readily accessible online sources of intelligence about the structure and performance of many nonprofit organizations, but they don't evaluate and rate everyone. Ask trusted experts about what groups are really doing the best work on multiple measures: breadth and depth of effective services, financial management, leadership, innovation, community support and involvement, sustainability, etc.

### 4. Make gifts that satisfy both your heart and head

Over time figure out what really inspires you and commit to giving most generously there. The real key to long-term success and satisfaction is to give honestly, not solely for ulterior motives.



Submitted Photo

The North Coast Symphonic Band received a \$2,500 grant from the Oregon Community Foundation to help with general operating expenses for the 2016-2017 season.

### 5. Leverage your resources

There are many simple ways to make your money go farther. For example, consider making a match challenge to other individuals and businesses who care about the same things you do. And investigate how "aggregators" such as community foundations can effectively pool donor dollars to increase the number and size of grants, scholarships and other forms of support.

### 6. Fewer may be better.

As the old saying goes, if you're thirsty, it's better to fill up a few cups than put one drop in a thousand. You'll achieve the greatest return on your investment with deeper, longer-term commitments, not with a flavor-of-the-month approach. And, if you have a solid giving strategy in place, it's much more reasonable to decline opportunities that don't fit the profile.

### 7. Involve family members and employees

Bring your children, grandchildren or parents into the conversation and give them a chance to share what is important to them so they can help guide your giving. Or, if you are a business owner, let staff members give you input on what causes and groups are most important to them. Even owners of micro-businesses often match their employees' donations up to a certain limit. Also, consider creating fun and meaningful staff volunteer activities such as a nonprofit facility clean-up or a holiday food drive.

### 8. Contribute things other than money

Time, talent, treasure — everyone has some of each. Once you've

identified who you want to support, constantly inventory what you have to give that matches up best with what's needed. In addition to cash, you may want to join a nonprofit's board or host a get-to-know brunch for potential donors.

### 9. Think outside the "collection box."

Many organizations, religious and secular alike, rely on donors who commit to making regular contributions. But, every once in a while, it's good to check around and see if there are emerging groups meeting new and more critical needs.

### 10. Ask for help when you need it.

If doing all the research and legwork associated with creating and managing your charitable giving this year seems daunting, think about tapping into the expertise of The Oregon Community Foundation ([www.oregoncf.org](http://www.oregoncf.org)). It has helped thousands of donors make this community and ones around our state great places to live and work.

One final thought. Although you may want to use charitable giving to enhance the visibility of your cause, not all donations need to be publicly acknowledged. Many cultural traditions teach that the most rewarding gifts are made quietly and we have a number of foundation donors who have expressed how much they love seeing themselves listed as "Anonymous" at the top of the donor list!

Max Williams is the president and CEO of The Oregon Community Foundation. The organization just announced \$162,000 in grants to support the important work of nonprofits along the North Coast.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Be of good cheer

As a small lad, our whole family would get up very early on Christmas morning to listen on the radio to King George's Christmas message. In his message in 1939, with his nation at war, he ended his speech with a poem, "The Gate of the Year" by Minerva Haskins. It went in part, and I quote, like this:

"And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, 'Give me light that I may tread safely into the unknown,' and he replied, 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.'"

At this Christmastime, and with

a coming new year, no matter what you're facing — sickness, family problems, loneliness, depression, sorrow — know this: There is a way through. There is hope. And that is the message of Christmas. So be of good cheer.

JIM BERNARD  
 Warrenton