

Richardson seeks to ease state ballot initiative restrictions

Critics worry changes would erode process

By **PARIS ACHEN**
Capital Bureau



Pamplin Media Group
Secretary of State Dennis Richardson has proposed easing restrictions on how signatures are gathered to qualify measures for the ballot.

SALEM — Oregon Secretary of State Dennis Richardson is pursuing a proposal to ease restrictions on how signatures are gathered to qualify measures for the ballot.

The change would allow petitioners to gather signatures while the official ballot title is still being composed or remains in dispute.

Allowing signature gathering during the ballot title determination means opponents of an initiative can no longer delay a campaign by filing legal challenges to the wording.

“The idea of using the courts as a way to stall the process of collecting signatures is something that is being used by both sides against the other,” Richardson said. “It is ... my job to make sure both sides have a fair shake with-

Another proposed change would permit members of the same household to fill out information for a family member such as an address provided that the voter signed the petition.

Such changes would reverse restrictions that the state Legislature and Richardson’s Democratic predecessors in the Secretary of State’s Office put in place in the past several years to combat signature fraud by paid petitioners.

Richardson is the first Republican to win election as secretary of state in Oregon in three decades.

Tightened rules also have hindered the number measures appearing on the ballot.

Opponents of the proposed changes say seeking signatures without a ballot title allows petitioners to misrepresent an initiative and could erode voters’ trust in the initiative process.

Voters should feel confident that the petition they sign matches the description that eventually appears on the ballot, said Ben Unger, executive director of Our Oregon.

Unger’s union-backed organization has led several high-profile initiative petition drives.

The changes could lead to a return to what Unger calls Oregon’s “Wild West days” of the initiative process when paid petitioners were forging signatures. “It would be a shame to go back to the old days,” he said.

Dan Meek and Eric Winters, two lawyers from vastly different political viewpoints who have been involved in the initiative petition process, both suggested the changes, Richardson said.

“Both came forward and said this is a problem and prevents people from having access to the initiative process,” Richardson said. “I asked people to let us know if there are impediments to a fair and open election system.”

Richardson took public comments on the proposal Friday and has until mid-September to make a final decision on the proposals.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.



Paul Gascoigne/The Daily Astorian

Firefighters battled a suspicious fire early Saturday morning behind Astoria Warehousing.

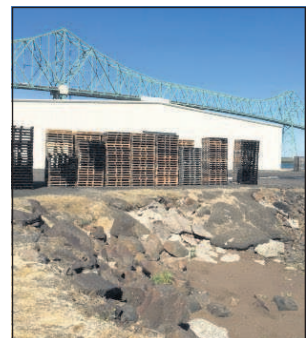
Suspicious fire breaks out at Astoria pier

The Daily Astorian

Astoria Police are investigating a large, suspicious pier fire that started early Saturday morning.

Dozens of pallets caught fire on the pier behind Astoria Warehousing just before 4 a.m. The Astoria and Warrenton fire departments responded, along with the Coast Guard from Cape Disappointment due to burning pallets falling into the river. Police consider the fire suspicious because the pallets were stored behind a locked gate.

Astoria Warehousing General Manager Dan Supple said this was the second time pallets have caught fire near the warehouse since it opened for business in 1983. He suspected arson was the cause.



Jack Heffernan/The Daily Astorian

The general manager of Astoria Warehousing suspects arson.

“There’s no other way that could have happened,” he said.

Anyone who may have information about the cause of the fire or who may have been involved can contact Astoria Police Detective Ken Hansen at 503-325-4411.

Hood to Coast runner arrested after alleged assault

Charged after bizarre incident during relay

By **JACK HEFFERNAN**
The Daily Astorian



David Jon Blackmon

A Hood to Coast runner was arrested early Saturday morning after allegedly stealing a pickup truck and running over another racer.

The pickup was servicing

port-a-potties at an exchange site near Birkenfeld at about 2 a.m. when David Jon Blackmon, 36, of Bend, allegedly entered it and began driving.

Soon after, he allegedly drove the truck through a field where runners were resting.

Three runners were able to move out of the way, while

another — Cynthia Gillespie of Canby — was run over and dragged a short distance, authorities said. The truck then stopped while her leg was pinned under a tire. She was later transferred to Oregon Health & Science University Hospital and released after being treated for minor injuries.

Blackmon allegedly fled the scene after the truck’s driver confronted him. Oregon State

Police located Blackmon in the nearby woods and charged him with second-degree assault, reckless endangering, unauthorized use of a motor vehicle, unauthorized entry into a motor vehicle, possession of a stolen vehicle and driving while revoked.

Blackmon was taken to Columbia County Jail. Police are still investigating the incident.

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