

OPINION

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OUR VIEW

It's not too late to vote

It's one of those potentially awkward moments.

You run into someone whose name you can't remember. Or you're straining to make small talk in a coffee shop. Maybe you're waiting in line somewhere and you just feel awkward.

We feel your pain. We're here for you. Here's your conversation starter: "Have you voted yet?"

If the answer is "yes," congratulate the person for doing his or her civic duty. Voting is the foundation of democracy, for which millions of people in America and around the globe have given their lives.

Across the earth, billions more hunger for that right to vote — the right to choose their leaders and their representative; the right to praise or criticize their public officials without fear of imprisonment.

Heavy stuff, when you think about it. So not voting amounts to being derelict in one's civic duty.

Back to the question, "Have you voted?" If the person's answer is "no," do not judge. The person is not alone. As of Monday afternoon, ballots had been received from fewer than 19 percent of Oregon voters.

Voters east of the Cascades led the way, with 47 percent in Grant County, nearly 40 percent in Wheeler County and 36 percent in Sherman County.



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Clatsop County Clerk Tracie Krevanko, left, and Sheryl Holcom look over the results of a test conducted on a machine that will count ballots.

Clatsop County voters are lagging, with only 26 percent of their ballots returned by Monday.

At the low end: Washington County, with barely 14 percent.

Those totals will rise today. Ballots mailed last week will arrive at county elections offices around the state.

Thousands more voters will celebrate Election Day by dropping off their bal-

lots in person. Some traditionalists will use the voting booths at their county elections office.

Still, the potential turnout looks dismal. On the other hand, that means every submitted vote will have greater influence. The not-yet-voted could decide the election, whether by their participation or their abstinence.

Oregon counts ballots as long as they

are turned in by 8 p.m. at any official drop site or county elections office, or if you're in line to drop them off.

That's right — anywhere in Oregon counts. You may use a drop site in the county where you work or go to school, if that's more convenient than the county where you live. It will just take longer for your ballot to join the unofficial election results.

If you've misplaced your ballot, you have until 8 p.m. today to get a new one at your home county elections office and vote.

Feel free to remind the not-yet-voted that today's election is the first step in choosing Oregon's next governor, legislators and a scad of other officeholders, including three seats on the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners. Some statewide offices, such as state labor commissioner and Supreme Court justice, likely will be decided today. Four tax measures also are on the ballot throughout the county.

Lack of information is no reason for abstaining. The state Voters' Pamphlet was mailed to every voting household and is online. If you can't decide how to vote in some races, skip those and vote where you're sure. An incomplete ballot is better than an unreturned ballot.

But you already know all this, right? You did vote ... didn't you?

GUEST COLUMN

Public lands should be for the public to enjoy

Winter is finally winding down, and people are heading outside to enjoy the great outdoors.

Enjoying and protecting our outdoor places has helped define what's exceptional about our country. Millions of Americans enjoy hiking, biking, hunting, camping, boating, fishing and numerous other outdoor activities that improve our health and quality of life, while contributing to our nation's economic growth, especially in rural areas. In February 2018, the Bureau of Economic Analysis reported that recreation activities account for almost \$400 billion in economic productivity in the

U.S. The growing outdoor recreation economy presents a win-win for us all.

However, when we head back home and talk to Utahns and Oregonians, we hear from outdoor recreation enthusiasts in every corner of our states about the bureaucratic red tape they encounter when they try to get outdoors.

While outdoor recreation continues to grow in popularity and economic impact, some barriers still exist. Well-intentioned but overly burdensome federal rules often stymie access to recreation on public lands while not providing any additional protections to our natural resources.

Thankfully, there are members of Congress in both parties who are serious about increasing access to public lands. Our Recreation Not Red Tape Act is evidence of a true bipartisan solution to this problem.

This bill untangles the web of regulations and permitting hurdles that hinder access to public lands. While permits are often necessary for orderly use of land and to ensure public safety, many times they simply thwart access. What's worse, the multiple land management agencies that issue recreation permits often fail to coordinate or miss critical deadlines, which threatens the livelihoods of small business owners and their employees.

Federal agencies should be able to overcome communication difficulties and resolve jurisdictional quandaries quickly. Too many Americans are turned away by permitting processes that are convoluted, confusing, and time-consuming. Streamlining this process is long overdue. We're all on the same team, it is time to start acting like it.

In Washington, politicians on both sides of the aisle often talk a big game, but fall short on real solutions. Yet holding our government accountable is essential. The Recreation Not Red Tape Act creates benchmarks that measure the effectiveness of federal land managers to ensure that they are truly serving the American people. The Recreation Not Red Tape Act also holds land managers account-



AP Photo/Andrew Selsky

The Crooked River winds its way through Smith Rock State Park in central Oregon. Smith Rock is one of the state's "7 Wonders."



U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden visits Haystack Rock.

able for expanding access to new and existing recreational opportunities.

While some may argue it is not possible to

promote activities such as recreation without imperiling other uses of federal lands, or the multiple-use mandate of our public lands, we

believe this is a false dichotomy. The solutions this bill puts forward don't amount to a choice between one or the other. Instead, our bill reinforces the basic principle that many uses of federal lands can and should coexist.

Keeping recreation alive and thriving for the American people isn't something that divides us. We all know we should put down our electronic devices every once in a while and go outside. Recreational activities provide an outlet for more physical activity, a healthier citizenry and a greater appreciation for our natural resources. Our economy ultimately benefits from this.

Democrats and Republicans can't seem to agree on much these days, but we do agree about the importance of increasing and enhancing access to outdoor recreation. The Recreation Not Red Tape Act is an opportunity to seize on this moment of bipartisanship, proving that working together is good for the American people and the public lands they are eager to access.

Democrat Ron Wyden is the senior U.S. senator for Oregon.