

# OPINION



# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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Founded in 1873

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## OUR VIEW

# Oregon leads nation in ease of voting

Unlike much of the U.S., last month's mid-term election was ho-hum in Oregon — as in, few election snafus.

The state Elections Division certified Oregon's results last week, while races in some states remained undecided amid recounts, court challenges and allegations of fraud. From California to North Carolina, questions have been raised about the security of absentee voting by mail.

In Oregon, 1,914,923 voters cast ballots — a record for a mid-term election. Voting violations are rare, although a union-backed group, Our Oregon, did deliver 97 ballots to the Multnomah County elections office a day after the election deadline. The state Elections Division is investigating.

The ballots were collected from voters but not turned in by Defend Oregon, a political action committee affiliated with Our Oregon. Groups collect ballots to ensure they are cast, but the practice — called ballot harvesting — has raised concerns in some states for fear that partisan groups might have discarded ballots, because of the voters' demographics, or altered unsealed ballots.

Such concerns provide one more reason why Oregon should make its ballots postage-paid so more voters mail them in, as Gov. Kate



AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus

**Elections volunteer Linda Brown points a voter to a designated ballot drop box in Lake Oswego outside City Hall on Nov. 6.**

Brown proposed in her 2019-21 state budget recommendation.

The reality is that the term “vote-by-mail” is inaccurate. Ballots are delivered to voters by mail but not necessarily returned that way. A 2016 survey found the majority of voters in Oregon, California and Washington took their ballots to a county elections office or official drop-site.

Oregon led the nation in launching all-mail voting, and this year

gained the distinction of being the No. 1 state for ease of voting. Political scientists from Northern Illinois University, Jacksonville University and China's Wuhan University created a “Cost of Voting Index” to analyze each state's election laws.

Following Oregon at No. 1 were Colorado, California, North Dakota and Iowa. At the bottom: Mississippi, Virginia, Tennessee, Indiana and Texas.

Oregon combines vote-by-mail with automatic voter registration when an Oregon resident and U.S. citizen visits the DMV to apply for, renew or replace a state driver license, permit or identification card. Brown wants to expand that automatic registration to include citizen interactions at other state agencies.

By the way, 16- and 17-year-olds can register, but not vote until age 18.

However, Oregon lags in other ways. A third of U.S. states allow voter registration up through Election Day. North Dakota doesn't even require registration. Yet Oregon cuts off registration 20 days before an election, having ended same-day registration in the 1980s because followers of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh recruited homeless individuals around the U.S. to come to Wasco County and vote for the sect's local candidates.

Vote-by-mail in Oregon has been studied extensively. There is little evidence of fraud, although 48 individuals were suspected of voting twice in the 2016 presidential election, and six ballots were submitted from dead persons.

Such allegations are unsettling in a state that prides itself on clean elections. Yet they are tiny compared with the complaints of election fraud and vote suppression roiling other states.

## LETTERS

### Airbnb vote was shortsighted, mean-spirited

Regarding the Dec. 3 Airbnb vote (“Astoria passes new homestay lodging license,” The Daily Astorian, Dec. 4): Once again the Astoria City Council has made a decision that is both shortsighted and mean-spirited.

Shortsighted, in that Airbnb hosts are some of the best advocates for Astoria, bringing strangers into their homes, treating them like personal guests, and treating them with all that Astoria offers. Mean-spirited in that the Airbnb hosts I personally know operate on a slim margin and often, as was made clear in the meeting, use their meager profits to pay house expenses.

Our lame-duck council may believe that licensing and inspection fees will help fill city coffers; they have not looked further ahead to see how many hosts will do the math and say, “Not worth it.”

I moved to Astoria only after visiting three summers in a row, each time staying with a different Airbnb host. They more than welcomed me. They drew me into life in Astoria, listened to my plans to live here, and advised me on great places where I could volunteer and quickly become part of the community.

If City Council members think I could have easily gained these perspectives from motel owners, they are blind indeed.

ELLEN FRYE  
Astoria

### Express your opinions on hotel project

The almost 48-foot tall Fairfield Hotel project at Second Street and the Astoria Riverwalk will be before the Astoria City Council on Dec. 12 at 6:30 p.m., in what will likely be its last public hearing. This massive project will set the standard for much of the Urban Core plan between Second and 16th streets and the City Council needs to hear from you.

The developer believes design standards and guidelines only apply to alterations/additions and not all uses, as required. They also believe their entire four-story hotel isn't subject to review of its mass and scale by the city. The City Council needs to hear from you that new buildings must meet design standards and guidelines, and the entire Fairfield Hotel must be subject to review of its mass and scale, or what you enjoy about our riverfront and Riverwalk will soon be lost.

According to the recent staff report, the city suggested to the developer during



conversations at the pre-application stages how to reduce the large “box” appearance of the hotel, but they continue with what some say looks like a “cigar box.”

Please try to attend this Wednesday's 6:30 p.m. City Council meeting about the Fairfield Hotel to express your concerns or support others. The Riverwalk and riverfront and Astoria need you.

MARY LANGLEY  
Astoria

### Constitution's framers saw Trump coming

On the morning of Nov. 7, President Donald Trump forced Attorney General Jeff Sessions from his position and immediately installed Matthew Whitaker as acting attorney general. Trump did so without the advice and consent of the Senate. Whitaker has been outspoken on Trump's behalf; it was a transparent attempt by Trump to try to control the Mueller investigation. Unless Whitaker recuses himself, he could take charge of the investigation.

The courts will decide whether Trump's move to install Whitaker was legal. Paul Rosenzweig, a George W. Bush admin-

istration attorney, said of Whitaker's appointment, “It can't be the case that the Constitution and its framers, having just fought a war to end kingly tyranny, enabled a king.”

Tom Goldstein, an attorney who appears frequently before the Supreme Court, wrote, “The framers saw Donald Trump coming almost 250 years ago. They had King George to work from.”

The founders required in Article II, Section 2, Clause 2 the advice and consent of the Senate for the appointment of officers like the attorney general. The Senate confirmation process is a check on the president's powers. The founders feared that unchecked, a president could act like a king and appoint loyalists and place him or herself above the law.

LAURA ALLEN  
Seaside

### Celebrate efforts to make commercial fishing safer

I appreciated seeing Colin Murphey's photography feature showing our local commercial fishing crews engaged in

safety training on Nov. 30 (“Fishing — the Most Dangerous Game,” The Daily Astorian). However, the headline struck me as somewhat inappropriate for the content.

The Coast Guard holds a drill conductor training here in Astoria three to four times a year, and Oregon Sea Grant helps get fishermen signed up. These classes fill up regularly, both with greenhorns and fishermen who have been going to sea for years. I see this as a testament to our fleet's dedication to safety and preparedness. Oregon Sea Grant recently held two First Aid Kit Building workshops, based on Oregon State University research on injury prevention. We have equipped 10 vessels to be better prepared for medical situations at sea — where medical assistance can be hours away — and hope to hold more of these workshops in the future.

These and other actions that our commercial fishing community are taking to make commercial fishing a safer occupation should be celebrated, rather than held up to illustrate the dangers of the job. Despite the inherent risks, the crew of the F/V Courageous and other fishermen are training hard to increase their likelihood of coming home safe at the end of day.

AMANDA GLADICS  
Astoria