

# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## OUR VIEW

# Ask voters about Electoral College change

A few weeks ago, state Sen. Betsy Johnson of Scappoose took to the Senate floor and pointed out the irony within a proposal to change how Oregon helps elect our nation's president.

Senate Bill 870 would require that Oregon's votes in the Electoral College be cast for whoever wins the national popular vote for president, regardless of the election outcome in Oregon. Supporters of that legislation say they believe in "one person, one vote," yet they don't want to send the proposed election change to the voters.

That rankled Johnson. "If we're going to change how we're going to elect the president of the United States, it should be referred to the ballot," she told her fellow senators.

We agree.

A majority of her colleagues disagreed. The bill passed the Senate 17-12 and now is in the House, where the Rules Committee approved it this week on a party-line vote with no discussion. It could go to the House floor next week for final action.

The House passed similar bills in previous years, only to see them disappear in the Senate. This year, advocates started in the Senate, where the increased number of liberal Democratic senators ensured passage.

Our nation's founders created a process in which electors — now referred to as the Electoral College, a term that does not appear in the Constitution — choose the president and vice president. This arrangement was an 18th-century compromise between Congress electing the president and hav-



Vice President Joe Biden presents an Electoral College ballot as House Speaker Paul Ryan watches during a joint session of Congress in January 2017 to certify Donald Trump's presidential victory.

ing the people do so. It also gave a greater voice to smaller states, although advocates of National Popular Vote say that no longer applies.

The Electoral College has proved controversial, to say the least. Through the centuries, more than 700 proposals have been introduced in Congress to reform or eliminate the Electoral College. The impetus stems in large part from five presidents — including two of the past three — losing the popular vote but winning the presidency via the Electoral College.

That is how Republicans Donald Trump and George W. Bush came to occupy the White House instead of Democrats Hillary Clinton in 2016 and Al Gore in 2000. The other three, in case you're wondering, are presidents Benjamin Harrison (1888), Rutherford B. Hayes (1876) and John Quincy Adams (1824).

Democrat Johnson recalled that recent history in her floor speech.

"There are two words not mentioned in Senate Bill 870: Donald Trump. In my opinion, he's the reason the National Popular Vote has caught on so aggressively of late," she said. "If we're going to end an historic institution, let it be prompted by something loftier than dislike for one particular president.

"Let regular voters make that decision, not the Legislature."

SB 870 would add Oregon to the 14 states, plus the District of Columbia, that have adopted the "Interstate Compact for Agreement Among the States to Elect the President by National Popular Vote."

If Oregon joined, participating jurisdictions would have a collective total of 196 electoral votes. The compact will become legally binding once enough more states have joined to reach an Electoral College majority — 270 votes.

The Electoral College comprises 538 electors. Each state has as many electors as it does U.S. senators and members of the U.S. House of Representatives, giving Oregon seven electors. And under the 23rd Amendment to the Constitution, the District of Columbia is allocated three electors.

Like most other states, Oregon has required its electors to cast their Electoral College ballots for whichever presidential candidate wins the popular vote in their own state, regardless of what happened nationally.

Feelings run strong on both sides of the issue. Advocates of National Popular Vote consider the Electoral College an anachronism from an era in which the white male elite made all the decisions. They contend the current system disenfranchises members of political minorities — for example, Republicans in Oregon, Democrats in Idaho — because such states are predictably blue or red in presidential races.

Opponents warn that Americans should be very wary of tinkering with the U.S. Constitution, even in a roundabout way. They say the change would make it even less likely that presidential candidates would personally campaign in Oregon or other small states. They also argue that presidential elections would be effectively decided once East Coast voters cast their ballots three time zones ahead of the West Coast, making our votes irrelevant.

In any case, the Legislature should heed the words of Sen. Johnson. If lawmakers believe Oregon should join the National Popular Vote movement, then put the measure on the 2020 statewide primary election ballot.

## WHERE TO WRITE

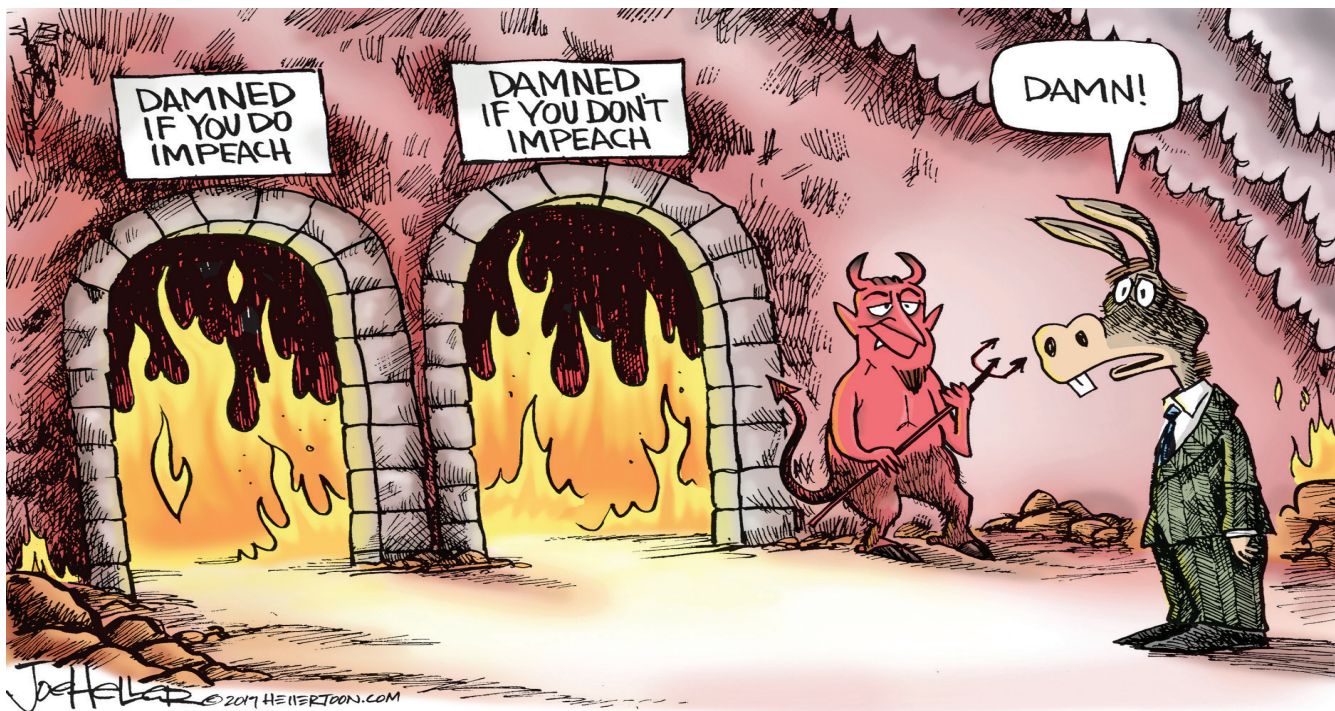
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## GUEST COLUMN

# In letting fake Pelosi video stand, Facebook shows its true colors

The truth is dead, and Facebook killed it.

That's not nearly as much of an exaggeration as you might wish. Consider that the social media colossus was the platform of choice for a video that blazed across the internet last week, purporting to depict a drunken Nancy Pelosi giving a speech.

The clip was pretty basic, as dirty tricks go. Pelosi's voice was made to sound slurred simply by slowing the video and changing the pitch — none of the so-called "deepfake"

next-generation technology that experts say will soon render digital counterfeits indistinguishable from real videos.

But, given that that technology is now breathing down our necks, Facebook's mishandling of this relatively low-tech hoax did not inspire confidence. You see, where YouTube quickly took the clip down, Facebook refused. Yes, Twitter did, too, but it's Facebook, as the largest social media company on the planet, whose behavior is uniquely

ominous.

Rather than remove the video, it appended a note inviting would-be viewers to visit fact-checking sites where it has been debunked. This was apparently Facebook's way of having its proverbial cake and eating it, too. In so doing, it ducks the great responsibility that comes with its great power.

Sadly, this isn't the first time we've seen evidence of the company's spinal deficien-

cies. As reported in 2018 by the Columbia Journalism Review, among others, its willingness to serve as a conduit of misinformation has been linked to tribalistic violence and even death in places like Sri Lanka, Libya, Myanmar and India.

Of course, the public could end the misinformation crisis in a heartbeat. Just stop looking for news on Facebook. Connect with friends, argue politics, talk sports, yes,

yes and yes. But get your news from actual, reputable news organizations and, if you must share a story or video of some news event, make sure it originates with, or has been vetted by, one of them.

Boom. Problem solved.

Except that human nature doesn't work that way, does it? So often, people who think they want truth just want validation, something the real news doesn't always sup-

ply. But a fake video always will.

So Facebook's idea that it can stand to the side and accept no responsibility is a naive delusion at best, a craven abdication at worst. The company is simply too big, its reach too great, the potential for harm too vast, for this to continue. There are three possible scenarios here:

1. The courts step in. As a public figure, Pelosi is pretty much fair game for anything anyone says, but how long before a private citizen gets slimed and sees no reason to be quietly take it? Facebook would seem to be a defamation suit waiting to happen.

2. The government steps in. Any legislative remedy would likely be overly broad. But at some point, lawmakers may feel they have no choice.

3. Facebook grows up. The company seems to want to be a space where the Nazi stands equal with the Holocaust survivor. It seems to feel that assigning value to either betrays some vague, utopian ideal, some Jeffersonian spirit of free-wheeling debate. So instead, it embraces this moral pusillanimity, the same kind of "both sides" imbecility where newscasters call the Ku Klux Klan "racially insensitive."

This refusal to judge is a dangerous luxury at a time when reality is under siege and lies have become weapons of mass destruction. So Facebook has a decision to make. It has a side to choose.

Because in a war for truth, there are no conscientious objectors.

Leonard Pitts is a columnist for *The Miami Herald*.

**'WITH GREAT POWER, THERE MUST ALSO COME GREAT RESPONSIBILITY.'**

— Stan Lee, *Amazing Fantasy* #15, 1962



LEONARD PITTS JR.