



Jamie Hale/The Oregonian

A clearcut stands in Oregon's Coast Range.

Lawsuit filed over secretary of state's rejection of forest ballot measures

By **ROB DAVIS**
The Oregonian

Backers of spurned ballot measures to tighten Oregon's forestry laws sued Monday, saying Oregon Secretary of State Bev Clarno broke with legal precedent and based her rejection on bad advice from political appointees.

The lawsuit, filed in Marion County Circuit Court, asks a judge to overturn the rejection and award attorneys' fees.

The ballot measures — Initiative Petitions 35, 36 and 37 — are each substantially the same. They call for tightening the state's aerial herbicide spraying laws, which today offer some of the West Coast's weakest protections for people and fish. They call for

more logging restrictions in steep, landslide-prone areas. They would prohibit conflicts of interest for state forestry board appointees, who today can set policies that benefit their own companies.

They have been proposed by environmental advocates, including the group Oregon Wild.

Clarno, a Republican, rejected the initiatives Sept. 24, saying they covered more than one subject. The Oregon Constitution says each ballot initiative can only address a single policy topic. Her spokesman did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

"The 'single-subject' requirement is not rigorous," says the lawsuit, filed by attorney Jesse Buss. "The

Oregon Supreme Court repeatedly has stated that the word 'subject' should be interpreted as broadly as possible."

Clarno's rejection delays proponents and means taxpayers will have to pay for the state's costs of defending the lawsuit. The advocates have refiled slimmed-down measures, now identified as Initiative Petitions 45, 46 and 47, without the language that drew Clarno's objections.

Two election law attorneys who've written Oregon ballot measures previously told The Oregonian the rejection was unprecedented. One said it would "easily" be overturned in court.

The suit says Clarno displayed "a general lack of knowledge" regarding for-

estry issues, citing a statement her office issued after its rejection that said questions about how "the Oregon Forest Council" manages logging rules didn't belong in measures addressing aerial spraying of herbicides in forests.

The Oregon Forest Council does not exist. The state board of forestry oversees Oregon's forest laws; the Oregon Forest & Industries Council is an industry group that has donated to the campaigns of Clarno and her deputy, former state Rep. Richard Vial.

As a lawmaker, Oregon House Speaker and candidate for state treasurer in the 1990s and early 2000s, Clarno took more than \$36,000 in donations from timber interests. Vial took \$19,000.

Oregon counties offer vote-by-mobile to overseas voters

By **ANDREW SELSKY**
Associated Press

SALEM — Two Oregon counties are offering the opportunity for U.S. military members, their dependents and others living overseas to vote in special elections this November with smartphones, officials announced Wednesday.

While some technology experts have warned that such systems could be insecure, the two counties have already advised hundreds of registered voters living overseas about the option to cast ballots using blockchain-based mobile voting. Oregon residents normally vote by mail.

Jackson County Clerk Christine Walker expressed confidence in the system and said it will help ensure that the votes of those overseas will be counted. She noted that overseas mail systems can be unreliable and that she was very worried that Washington's threats to pull the United States from the United Nations' postal agency would prevent voters overseas from casting ballots.

"We need to make sure that our military and overseas voters have the not only ability to vote, but they can easily access their ballots in a safe manner," Walker said. "There was a potential crisis going on."

The disruption to international mail was averted when the United States reached a compromise in September that enabled it to remain in the Universal Postal Union, the U.N. agency that coordinates postal policies among its 192 member countries.

Walker predicted the mobile pilot program that her county will be trying out in a Nov. 5 special election will offer a glimpse of what the future holds.

"My grandkids, great grandkids, great-great

grandkids, aren't going to want anything to do with a polling place, let alone a paper ballot," Walker said. "Their expectation is that they have it easily accessible on one of their devices."

The Oregon Secretary of State's Office, which oversees elections in the state, has endorsed the pilot project.

Deputy Secretary of State Rich Vial said in a statement that "by enabling these voters to cast a ballot using their mobile device ... we can make it easier, and at the same time more secure, for them to cast a ballot from wherever they are in the world."

Blockchain is a digital public ledger that can be shared and used by a large, decentralized network, making it theoretically more resistant to tampering.

Jackson County in southern Oregon has notified almost 400 voters overseas about the pilot project. Umatilla County in northern Oregon is also participating.

"This is very, very new to me," said Kim Lindell, elections manager of Umatilla County. "I'm not sure how well received it will be."

The county has sent 63 notices to overseas voters that they can vote using the new system, Lindell said.

"It's said to be very secure, and I think that our overseas people will benefit from it if they decide to give it a try," Lindell said.

The effort is a collaboration between the two county elections offices; Voatz, a Boston-based company providing the mobile elections platform; Tusk Philanthropies and the National Cybersecurity Center.

Voters using the system fill out absentee ballot requests, complete identity authentication and verification on the Voatz application, and submit their ballots.

Democrats to square off in secretary of state race

By **DIRK VANDERHART**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

It's been almost three years since a Democrat sat in the Oregon Secretary of State's Office. Now a cluster of prominent Democrats are preparing to battle each other to take it back.

On Wednesday, as expected, state Rep. Jennifer Williamson began her bid for Oregon's second-highest executive office. She joins state Sen. Mark Hass, D-Beaverton, and former congressional candidate Jamie McLeod-Skinner in the contest.

The addition of Williamson, who spent four years as the House majority leader, adds to the promise that the secretary of state primary will be hyper-competitive, and potentially bruising. As it stands now, the race somewhat resembles the 2016 primary for the job. In that race, then-Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian beat two prominent lawmakers, Richard Devlin and Val Hoyle.

Avakian went on to lose in the general election to Republican Dennis Richardson, who died of brain cancer earlier this year. His appointed replacement, Bev Clarno, has said she will not seek reelection.

Williamson, a four-term state representative from Portland, appears set on running to the left of other candidates. On a website that labels her "the proven progressive," a campaign video touts legislative progress on abortion protections, gun control and a forthcoming paid family and medical leave program. Those policies are somewhat removed

from the secretary of state's key responsibilities: regulating campaign finance laws and elections, auditing state programs and registering businesses.

Williamson goes on to describe a platform that includes ensuring elections security and accountability for public agencies.

"We need a secretary of state who will tenaciously protect our election process from foreign tampering," Williamson said in a statement. "I will make the cybersecurity of our election data and voter information my top priority."

Because of Oregon's use of paper ballots, rather than computerized voting machines, the state's elections are often seen as more secure than those in many other states.

Williamson also says she'll enforce rules that keep corporate money out of politics, though none yet exist in Oregon, and suggests she'll help draw equitable legislative district boundaries after the 2020 census. The latter job primarily falls to the Legislature, though the secretary of state acts as a backstop if lawmakers can't agree.

As a former majority leader, Williamson has experience raising large sums of money — even as she hasn't faced a competitive challenger since 2012. Her competition will be more stiff next year.

Hass formally announced in September that he will forgo another run at his Washington County district to pursue statewide office. A well-established figure in the Capitol — first as a tele-

vision news reporter, now as a six-term lawmaker who has served in both chambers — Hass logged a big win in the 2019 session by helping to craft a new tax on businesses.

Hass's platform includes elements common to all candidates: modernizing and protecting elections, pushing fair political boundaries and accountability through audits. But in recent weeks, Hass has also released policy proposals. Those include an idea for reducing government influence on a state commission dealing with public records, and a pledge to establish an ombudsman position to look into the state's troubled foster care system.

The two established lawmakers will also face a relative newcomer in Jamie McLeod-Skinner, a Terrebonne Democrat known for her credible challenge of Republican U.S. Rep. Greg Walden in 2018. Walden won comfortably, but still by a lower margin than any race since he was first elected to the seat in 1998.

When she announced her candidacy in August, McLeod-Skinner said she would emphasize the need for a rural Democrat in statewide office, with a focus on elections and audits.

McLeod-Skinner also has said she would self-impose limits on campaign finance contributions, though she had not yet decided what those limits would be in August. Depending on what she decides, that could tamp down a potential advantage over Williamson and Hass: They both voted yes on Senate Bill 1049.

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