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OUR VIEW

Imitate Oregon on voting by mail

Norma Paulus would be proud. And she would be amazed. As secretary of state from 1977 until 1985, Paulus was the prime mover of Oregon’s voting by mail. Other states have been slow to follow Oregon’s lead. But — in the way that sudden events provoke unexpected change — the coronavirus makes voting by mail a timely solution.

Oregon’s U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden and U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, of Minnesota, have authored legislation to make the mail ballot more prevalent.

For Wyden, this has been a long slog. He first introduced this legislation in 2002. “I’ve never had the interest that we have now,” he said during a Monday interview. “During the most recent slate of presidential primary elections, three states opted to postpone voting because of the coronavirus.”

In this climate, Wyden argues that the pandemic offers a stark choice. “Either people are not going to be able to vote or they vote by mail. If those are the two choices for America this fall, that is not a close call.”

Like the bottle bill, public beaches and statewide land use planning, voting by mail is one of Oregon’s emblematic, pioneering achievements. Initially, it was a Republican proposal, opposed by labor unions that influenced the Democratic Party. Then it became a Democratic party cause, led by Secretary of State Phil Keisling,



Don Ryan/AP Photo

Oregon was a leader in voting by mail.

who served in the 1990s.

Under Paulus, counties were allowed to use the mail ballot for nonprimary or nongeneral elections. When counties took advantage of the new mode of voting, turnout increased by factors of three and five, Keisling said.

In 1995, the Oregon Legislature enacted Keisling’s bill to allow voting by mail, but Gov. John Kitzhaber vetoed it.

Months later, a surprise allowed Keisling to make history. When Bob Packwood resigned from the U.S. Senate in 1995, county clerks across Oregon urged Keisling to conduct the sudden, special Senate election by mail ballot. He could do that, because existing statute prohibited mail ballots only in the primary and general elections.

The special primary in 1995 and

the general election in early 1996 became the first federal elections in America to be conducted by mail. Turnout was high — 58% in the special primary and 66% in the general. Wyden became Oregon’s new U.S. senator.

In 1998, Oregon voters by a margin of 2-to-1 approved a ballot measure mandating voting by mail in all Oregon elections.

Keisling has continued his advocacy within the National Vote At Home Institute, of which he is founder and a board member. His 2016 article in the Washington Monthly (“Vote From Home, Save Your Country”) is an extensive history of the national discussion of mail balloting.

In the most recent development, Wyden’s biggest opponent is the voting machine lobby. Of digital

voting, the Oregon Democrat says: “A voting machine with remote access software is the equivalent of putting an American ballot box in the Kremlin.” He disparages the voting machine lobby, saying: “They lied to me, to the New York Times. They stonewalled Congress.”

Wyden measures his progress by how many Republican senators who now say they are thinking about his proposal.

The emergency package in Congress in response to the coronavirus includes \$400 million to help states with elections, but Wyden and Klobuchar believe more help is needed.

“In times of crisis, the American people cannot be forced to choose between their health and exercising their right to vote,” the senators said in a statement. “While this funding is a step in the right direction, we must enact election reforms across the country as well as secure more resources to guarantee safe and secure elections. We will continue to fight to pass the Natural Disaster and Emergency Ballot Act of 2020 to ensure every eligible American can safely and lawfully cast their ballot.”

This newspaper’s editorial page has argued in favor of the mail ballot from the year that Secretary Paulus launched the idea. An adverse moment in history reinforces the case that voting by mail makes abundant sense.

It’s time for America to imitate Oregon.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Highly qualified

I am writing to urge you to vote for Courtney Bangs for Clatsop County commissioner. She is connected to the community through every aspect of her life.

Courtney understands her community because she is an active participant in the community. There are many things that make her highly qualified to represent the east side of Astoria, and the more rural east end of Clatsop County. Not only is she formally educated, holding a master’s degree from Oregon State University, she is a mom, she is a wife, a coach and teacher, as well as a strong community advocate.

A small but telling example of how Courtney reacts when her community is in need was demonstrated just recently. When elderly neighbors were stuck at home due to illness, and Knappa schools announced impending closure, she sprang into action creating Knappa Community Helping Hands to ensure those in the community would have a place to not only look for help, but provide help to others in whatever way they could. A co-op in the truest sense.

Courtney connects with people and builds working relationships that better her community. Please join me in supporting Courtney Bangs for Clatsop County Commissioner District 4.

KATY PRITCHARD
Astoria

Impressive ability

Clatsop County is a small town. Seriously, all of us together can’t muster the numbers to qualify as a city. It’s one of the many reasons why life here is so sweet. We know each other, we take care of each other and we have plenty of elbow room.

Sure, the influx of out of town guests can leave us thinking, “Who forgot to close the door?” But, like all good houseguests, they bring a hostess gift (in this case, cash) and then they go home.

When something happens to a few of us, it happens to all of us. We are irrefutably connected. So, it matters to me who serves on our political behalf, whether I am eligible to vote for that particular person or not.

Clatsop County Commissioner Kathleen Sullivan, representing District 4, is impressive in her ability to get things done, to insist on the accurate information she needs to make intelligent decisions, even when they’re difficult, to screen out

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ROSIE
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the static from special interests who would derail the mandated work of the county commission and to meticulously do the bodacious homework required to actually know what she’s talking about.

If I were in District 4, I’d sure keep Kathleen Sullivan.

MERIANNE MYERS
Warrenton

Utmost integrity

Courtney Bangs is running for Clatsop County commissioner, and I am grateful. Courtney has a bachelor of science degree, majoring in animal science, and a master of science degree in agriculture.

I can’t think of anyone more qualified to contribute an environmentally balanced approach as she advocates for Clatsop County regarding our natural resource economy, transportation, best practices for forest and fishery management, public safety, economic development, public health, substance abuse prevention, mental health services and other needs in our community.

Courtney clearly understands the need for relationships with our neighboring counties, states and advocating at a higher level with the integrity her background brings to the table.

I’ve spent time with Courtney, and find

her to be a person with the utmost integrity who looks for the greater good, and has the work ethic to learn and implement the collaborative work it takes to make a difference. Courtney’s agenda is to passionately and positively care about this great place we all call home — give her your vote!

ANN SAMUELSON
Seaside

Four more years

I have known Kathleen Sullivan for over 10 years, and have been impressed by her volunteer spirit. I am extremely appreciative for all she does in our county, and urge those people who live in her district to vote for her reelection in May.

Here are some lyrics I wrote that you can sing along to, if you like, to the tune of “We Got Rain” by Ray Raihala of Brownsmead Flats:

“Kathleen Sullivan is our county commissioner, she’s been on the job now for over three years. Kathleen’s got the experience for this most demanding job, and deserves another four-year term — yah sure! She deserves another four-year term.

“Helping out her neighbors is what she loves most, protecting health and safety of Clatsop County folks. Supporting public education is dear to her heart, as a former teacher she will do her part. And she

deserves another four-year term.

“Now Kathleen’s currently commission board chair, and serves on the Forest Trust Land Advisory Committee. She’s chair of the senior disability services board, and on the Astoria homeless task force. She’s a dedicated servant to us all. And she deserves another four-year term!”

NED HEAVENRICH
Brownsmead

Experience and skill

I applaud Clatsop County Commission Chairwoman Kathleen Sullivan’s guest column of March 24 (“We will get through this,” The Astorian). Her clear thinking and calm leadership is exactly what is needed to help us through this challenging coronavirus crisis.

Her understanding of the structure of all the governmental agencies and community groups, and her ability to help them communicate and work together as a team, is key to keeping Clatsop County residents safe and healthy.

I urge the voters in District 4 to keep Kathleen Sullivan on the county commission by voting for her in the upcoming May election. She has the experience and skill necessary for the job.

ERIC HALPERIN
Gearhart