

GUEST COLUMN

Oregon remains as divided as ever

The envelope opener in the Clackamas County elections office broke on Election Day, delaying processing of ballots.

That was a fitting metaphor for Election 2020 — heck, for all of 2020, a year that seems governed by Murphy’s law that whatever can go wrong, will go wrong.

But the ballot counting has gone on, in Clackamas and other counties, and the outcomes have been ... well, unsurprising. Our state remains as divided as any time in recent memory. Democrats dominate, except where



DICK HUGHES

they don’t.

Still, here are eight postelection questions.

1. Will Oregon’s political gap keep widening?

Democrats won all the statewide offices on the Nov. 3 ballot and also reelected their four congressional incumbents, solidifying the divide established in May’s primary election.

In May, Democrats chose state Sen. Shemia Fagan, of Portland, as their nominee for secretary of state over more-moderate candidates. In the sprawling 2nd Congressional District, Republicans picked state Sen. Cliff Bentz, of Ontario, as their nominee over Knute Buehler, of Bend, who previously had run for governor as a moderate. Bentz will succeed U.S. Rep. Greg Walden as the sole Republican in Oregon’s congressional delegation.

Fagan was a late replacement for Jennifer Williamson, who dropped out amid questions regarding her campaign finances, but won election this week with the strong backing of labor unions.

Fagan is every bit as liberal as Gov. Kate Brown, perhaps even more so, and is a polarizing figure in the state Senate. Sen. Fred Girod, of Lyons, now the Senate Republican leader, famously asked to be taken off the Senate Housing Committee in 2019 because of Fagan’s actions as committee chair.

Republicans dislike Brown politically. But now they may hope that she forgoes any job opportunity, such as in a potential Joe Biden presidential administration, that would cause her to resign as governor and automatically elevate Fagan to that office.

In another sign of the continued partisan divide, one of the most moderate Republican legislators lost her reelection bid, succumbing to Bend’s becoming increasingly blue. After a bitter campaign, state Rep. Cheri Helt was ousted by Democrat Jason Kropf.

2. Who will run the Legislature?

Democrats. But which Democrats? In the Senate, the Democrats’ lib-



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Locals watch presidential election reports on television at Bridge & Tunnel in Astoria.

eral wing was solidified by the election, which means moderate Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, finally could be on his way out. Or Courtney could make the necessary concessions to stay in power.

Both he and House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, have held their leadership positions longer than anyone else in Oregon history. Unlike Courtney, Kotek is unafraid to wield an iron fist. Despite ranking some moderates, she mostly has retained the backing of her fellow liberals.

One question will be whether moderate lawmakers can have an impact in the 2021 Legislature. In September, Rep. Marty Wilde, D-Eugene, launched a bicameral, bipartisan discussion group to cross political lines. The participants meet via Zoom, with one Democrat and one Republican together leading each discussion topic. The September meeting brought together 12 House members and five senators — 11 Democrats and six Republicans. They talked about campaign finance reform, police reform, broadband and community connectivity and emergency management.

During the summer’s special sessions, Wilde challenged his party leadership by calling for greater transparency and public discussion of issues. As he told me in an email this week, “I’d like to make sure we don’t lose our values in favor of expediency.”

3. How long will political parties — especially the GOP — remain relevant?

Oregon’s motor-voter registration system has succeeded in swelling the ranks of new voters, many of whom choose to forgo any party affiliation. Of Oregon’s nearly 3 million voters, just 25.8% are Republicans and 35.7% are Democrats.

Nationally, Republicans did better this week than predicted, especially in U.S. House and Senate races. Yet in Oregon, it was more of the same. Pollster John Horvick has suggested that to rebound in Oregon, the Republican Party must take a different approach

than in other states.

By the way, the 2021 Oregon Senate will now include Art Robinson, of Cave Junction, who chaired the Oregon Republican Party during 2013-14 and was the unsuccessful Republican nominee against 4th Congressional District U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio in 2010, ’12, ’14, ’16 and ’18. Robinson won the legislative seat being vacated by Sen. Herman Baertschiger Jr., R-Grants Pass.

4. What’s next for Alek Skarlatos?

The national pundits were wrong in 2018 when they suggested the Republican Buehler had a good chance of toppling Brown. She won by 6.4 percentage points.

The pundits were wrong again about Alek Skarlatos, of Roseburg, a Republican who now has lost races for Douglas County commissioner and for the

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Be careful

When the dust clears, it looks like Joe Biden will be our next president. It is interesting and ironic to note that The Astorian editors endorsed him, considering that after that, they also complained in a half-page editorial about an uneven playing field with big tech companies that aggregate news.

Were they not aware that the same companies they complain about financed, aided, abetted and bought Biden’s campaign and the presidency? Good luck getting the field evened.

Be careful what you wish for.

ROBERT LIDDYCOAT
Seaside

Be neighborly

I was raised in this community. Here I was taught to respect your neighbors. It’s also the place where I learned that a person’s character was not solely based on what that person says, but also the actions behind those words.

Other than a book written by someone else, has President Donald Trump ever been successful? He has claimed bankruptcy on every business venture he has pursued. That means almost all who have worked for him did not get paid for work already done. That’s a good businessman? Even members of his own family call him a fraud.

East of 38th Street in Astoria is a small community named Alderbrook. This whole area was established because of racism between Scandinavian settlers — white-on-white racism. This was mostly due to the lack of education at that time. So what is going on?

I’m sure we have all seen some of our

neighbors being very passionate about this man. These flag wavers have also shown their own true colors. They support racism and a sexist mentality. They support hate. It’s only proof that some take longer to evolve than others.

After the elections are over, please be neighborly to those who are pursuing hate. To quote: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

TROY HASKELL
Astoria

Mail-in mayhem

The question of the integrity of the 2020 election began on opening night with the Iowa caucus fiasco, which took weeks to figure out who won.

Vote integrity was later challenged this fall in New York, where some 100,000 absentee ballots were deemed erroneous due to “printing errors.”

Of course, there is the example of the 2000 “hanging chad” election that was ultimately decided by the Supreme Court.

Now that there are legitimate questions about several states being involved in vote irregularities, it appears that mail-in mayhem will taint whomever wins the 2020 presidential election.

Any honest analysis will point out that when states that had never held mail-in elections, and are suddenly required to deal with the extra paperwork involved, there are bound to be problems such as those seen this election cycle. Throw in the obstacles of the COVID-19 pandemic protocols, and one could conclude the chances for fraud rise exponentially.

For those who might tend to doubt this claim, one needs to look at how state departments of transportation handle auto-



LETTERS WELCOME

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mobile transactions, or employment departments deal with unemployment claims, in the time of the coronavirus. And then there are the ongoing problems states are having with K-12 education.

One positive outcome of this year’s election is that neither presidential candidate will have a mandate to promote their policy initiatives. If someone tells me that “elections have consequences,” or “the people have spoken,” I can honestly respond by saying, “Really?”

MATT JANES
Jeffers Gardens