

Bernie Foster
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Advertising ManagerChristen McCurdy
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Graphic DesignerArashi Young
ReporterMonica J. Foster
Seattle Office CoordinatorSusan Fried
Photographer

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415 N. Killingsworth St.
P.O. Box 5455
Portland, OR 97228Telephone (503) 285-5555
Fax: (503) 285-2900

info@theskanner.com

www.TheSkanner.com

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Opinion

Protesting the Right to Vote: Democracy Awakening

When we think about the right to vote, it is and should be understood to be a civic sacrament in the temple of democracy. However, this presidential election will be the first in 50 years without the full protection of the Voting Rights Act.

In 1965, the Voting Rights Act was enacted with the blood, sweat and tears of Americans from all across the country. But 50 years later, we're still dealing with a multi-hued, multi-racial, multi-ethnic form of bias and discrimination at the ballot box.

To combat this assault on the right to vote, the NAACP has come together with more than 260 organizations – representing the labor, peace, environmental, student, racial justice, civil rights and money in politics reform movements – to stage a mass convergence this month on Washington, D.C. and call for democracy reforms.

On April 16-18, thousands of activists will mobilize in the nation's capital for Democracy Awakening, a three-day event featuring a rally, march, teach-ins, lobbying and civil disobedience. Democracy Awakening plans to fight back against business

Cornell
William
BrooksNAACP
President
and CEO

as usual in Washington, D.C., and demand a democracy that works for everyone. This means restoration of full voting rights, breaking the stranglehold corporations and the wealthy have on elections, and demand Congress hold hearings and vote to fill

“We have seen state legislature after state legislature engage in a Machiavellian frenzy of voter disenfranchisement

the U.S. Supreme Court vacancy.

People all across the country, African-Americans, Latinos, students, and senior citizens feel as though the civic sacrament of the right to vote is being threatened. As a result of the U.S. Supreme Court's misguided Shelby County decision in 2013, which invalidated Section 4(b) of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, millions of Americans are now denied the strong protection of their right to

vote. Since then, we have seen state legislature after state legislature engage in a Machiavellian frenzy of voter disenfranchisement.

More than 30 states have imposed voter ID laws, which on their face seem innocuous. But, when we keep in mind which American voters don't possess these ID's, we have reason to be alarmed.

Consider the state of Texas. Because of voter ID laws, it is estimated that between 500,000 to 700,000 eligible citizens do not possess the prerequisite I.D. – dispro-

years – is at risk.

Students also are being put at risk. In Texas, a law essentially said, if you have an ID that allows you to carry a concealed weapon, it is deemed sufficient as civic proof of identification to vote.

But a library card – an I.D. that allows you to carry a book of Shakespeare or of chemistry – is deemed an insufficient form of proof to vote.

Consider North Carolina, once the most progressive state in the country with respect to voting rights. But, in a few short years in the wake of Shelby, we saw a massive rollback in terms of that franchise.

Among the measures that were curtailed or constrained: “pre-registration,” which allowed 17-year-olds who were about to turn 18 in time for a new election to register early; Sunday voting and early voting.

Instead of curtailing and restraining the right to vote, we should be expanding it. It is, once again, the time to stand up and fight for our right to vote.

The NAACP is committed to breaking down barriers to the ballot box and maximizing the vote.

portionately affecting low-income citizens, African-Americans, and Latinos.

We know that voter ID laws also disproportionately disenfranchise the elderly. For example, 93-year-old Rosanell Eaton is legally challenging North Carolina's voter ID law. She has voted for 70 years – but, because she was born at home, because her name does not match the name on the birth certificate or match the name on the voting roll, her franchise – notwithstanding the fact that she voted for 70

Let's Re-Focus on Closing Shell Companies and Tax Havens

It is hard to believe that the second easiest place in the world to run a shady, anonymous, and often criminal corporation is right here in the United States. According to a recent academic study, the United States is second only to Kenya for harboring these shell companies used to launder money and skirt their taxes.

Much like the classic sleight-of-hand game, companies across the country – including many here in Oregon – are shifting and shuffling ownership and holdings until we lose track of who or where they are.

Criminal organizations regularly set up shell companies to launder ill-gotten revenues and fund their criminal enterprise. In the case of multi-national corporations, however, what they are doing is not illegal. That doesn't mean there aren't victims. The elaborate game of deception corporations play costs the average taxpayer nearly \$1,500 annually, close to \$4,000 if you own a small business. They shift, they shuffle, and we pick up the tab.

This month's leak of the Panama Papers revealed more than 11 million documents from a Panamanian legal team showing the actual dev-

Maurice
RahmingGuest
Columnist

astating toll anonymous shell companies take on the world, signally a time for U.S. action.

Our own Senator Ron Wyden has commented on the paper's release and says he will open an inquiry into the

“The elaborate game of deception corporations play costs the average taxpayer nearly \$1,500 annually

tax evasion issues revealed. While we applaud his efforts, this issue can't be tackled alone. The Main Street Alliance, and our national coalition partners at FACT (Financial Accountability and Corporate Transparency) call on Senator Merkley and our representatives in Congress to not only look into the criminal avoidance of taxes but to develop a head-on approach.

We are calling on our members of Congress to pass a law to stop the creation of anonymous shell companies that facilitate crimes, of which ev-

eryday Americans are the victim, and call these tax avoiding multinational corporations what they are, criminals. America shouldn't be one of the easiest places in the world to form these companies; we can't afford to be.

Roughly 100 media outlets collaborated on the “Panama Papers” investigation, and they have begun publishing a series of stories based on documents leaked from the prominent Panama-based law firm Mossack Fonseca. Many

of these secretly owned companies exposed in the papers operate in Nevada or Wyoming, but recent reporting from the *Portland Business Journal* suggest that Oregon is not far off.

These states act as getaway cars for money launderers, terrorists and corporate tax evaders, and it is time to take away the keys. Requiring the collection and publication of information on who owns and controls these companies would make it much harder to launder dirty money.

Small business owners across the country and our

coalition partners urge the House Ways & Means Committee to eliminate the offshore tax loopholes abused by wealthy individuals and multinational companies to avoid paying taxes that then must be made up by individual citizens and small businesses, to the tune of \$150 billion a year.

Some of the biggest companies in the country – like Apple, Pfizer, Wal-Mart and, of course, Nike – shift their profits offshore to a network of foreign subsidiaries in countries known for their abnormally low corporate tax rates. Use of such systems allows 358 of the largest 500 multinational companies in the U.S. to avoid paying their fair share in taxes.

Likewise, offshore tax haven secrecy enables wealthy Americans to secretly hide their wealth abroad, away from tax authorities – sticking the rest of us with the tab. The Stop Tax Haven Abuse Act – currently pending in both the House and Senate – would end the ability of wealthy individuals to cheat on their taxes while simultaneously putting an end to the ability of the biggest companies in the world to indefinitely defer paying the taxes that they owe.