

THE Skanner

Challenging People to Shape
a Better Future Now

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TheSkannerNews

Opinion

Measure 117 is a Simple Improvement to Our Elections

The right to vote is the most precious right of all because all other rights are dependent on it. For Black Americans, the struggle for voting rights has been central to our experience in American society. For well over 200 hundred years, heroes from Ida B. Wells to Fannie Lou Hammer to John Lewis have risked life and limb to gain and protect the right to vote.

Still, it is easy in our current political climate for some to feel frustrated and discouraged. Political forces around the country have launched an all-out assault on voting rights that targets Black communities. State legislatures are restricting voting access in districts with large Black populations and are imposing other barriers and pernicious restrictions.

Our communities have faced numerous barriers to participating in the democratic process, including a lack of meaningful choices and voters not seeing ourselves reflected in candidate options. These barriers also negatively impact candidates



Nkenge Harmon Johnson
Pres./CEO, Urban League of Portland

who would like to run for office. In the way our elections work now, candidates of color are often told to “wait their turn” or are discouraged from running for office for fear that they will “split” the vote with another candidate. Ultimately, this fear can act as a barrier for people of color to seek elected office despite a strong desire to represent their communities.

To ensure that our democracy here in Oregon continues to thrive and is strengthened, we not only have to improve and broaden access but make the process one that is fair and reflective of the choices our communities want to make.

The Urban League of Portland supports Measure 117 because it will lead to a diversity of voices in our elections and improve representation

for all Oregonians.

Our democracy thrives when more people, of all cultures, faiths and backgrounds, have a seat at the table. Oregon has the opportunity to realize this principle of equity with Measure 117. In the places that have adopted ranked choice voting, more first-time candidates, women, people of color and young people, run for office and win

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in greater numbers. One example is New York City, which elected its most diverse city council in 2022 featuring a majority of women and people of color with the help of ranked choice voting. We can also look at the dozens of plac-

es that use ranked choice voting, like the state of Maine, to know that voters of all demographics like it, understand it, and prefer it to the current system.

Measure 117 will address these issues by giving voters more choices on their ballots to choose candidates that best represent us, and in turn, giving candidates more opportunities to run and win. Measure 117 opens up the playing field for a larger bench of diverse candidates with different lived experiences so all Oregonians can see themselves reflected in the candidate pool.

Measure 117 will create ranked choice elections for statewide and federal offices in Oregon, giving us the option to vote for our favorite candidates and rank our backup choices, too.

Our bottom line is that ranked choice voting is a simple improvement to our elections that helps ensure all voice are heard in our democracy, which is why we are encouraging voters to vote YES on Measure 117 this November.

How Head Start Shaped My Life

Head Start alumnus Duchesne Drew is senior vice president of American Public Media Group and president of Minnesota Public Radio. Duchesne’s career has been punctuated with several accolades: In 2021, he was inducted into the Hall of Achievement at Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism; he received the 2022 Spurgeon Award for Outstanding Community Leaders; and in 2022, he was named to The Root 100, an annual list of the most influential Black Americans in the fields of arts, community, business, entertainment, media, and politics. He shared how Head Start played a role in his life.



Duchesne Drew
Guest Columnist

me as a learner. That affirmation has influenced my journey from Head Start to public media president.

After Head Start, I attended Public School #159 for the first grade, and near the end of that school year, my mother and I moved to Freeport,

“It’s been a collection of intentional investments in my potential that have shaped me into who I am today

New York, on Long Island. My mom always seemed to be a step ahead, and to ensure I didn’t experience learning loss; she bought the first-grade reading and math books from the school before we moved and the second-grade books. I spent the rest of the school year and summer com-

pleting the lessons in those books. When I began second grade in my new school, those same books were the texts for the year, meaning I was well ahead!

I was a top performer for the remainder of my primary and secondary school years. I graduated from Freeport High School in the top 10% of my class and was accepted into three Ivy League schools. I decided to attend Columbia University to take advantage of being in New York City and remain close to home. While there, I volunteered with and worked for Upward Bound, one of the federal TRiO programs. TRiO programs identify and support high school students from historically marginalized communities as they progress through school and prepare for college. As part of my time with Upward Bound, I saw firsthand the difference that the wraparound approach makes in the lives of students and their families. When I reminisce about the program’s impact on our students, I also think of Head Start and how it offers wrap-around services to children and families to provide the support they need while on the journey to self-sufficiency.

After completing my undergraduate studies, I worked at Columbia University as a development officer for Up-

ward Bound and its sister program, Talent Search, for a few years, successfully securing program funding. I then earned a master’s degree at Northwestern University, focusing on journalism. While I was in graduate school, I got an internship with the Minneapolis Star Tribune, one of the nation’s largest newspapers. From that internship, I landed a permanent reporting role and ultimately rose to managing editor of operations with oversight for the copy and design desks, IT, recruitment, training, and more. This experience was an excellent foundation for my future path. After a five-year stint as a vice president of a local foundation, I was hired to lead MPR in early 2020, and I’ve been here ever since.

I’m incredibly proud to be a part of MPR. I’m energized by expanding the circle of people who depend on our news, information, and music programming. Our ‘going deeper’ approach helps the public to bridge gaps and form connections through meaningful community engagement and listening experiences.

When I look for the common thread throughout my life’s journey, it’s been a collection of intentional investments in my potential that have shaped me into who I am today. Head Start is one of those investments.