

EAST OREGONIAN

Founded October 16, 1875

KATHRYN B. BROWN
Publisher

DANIEL WATTENBURGER
Managing Editor

JENNINE PERKINSON
Advertising Director

TIM TRAINOR
Opinion Page Editor

OUR VIEW

Record returns can still improve

Oregonians voted yesterday — or at least the government counted our votes yesterday.

Thanks to vote by mail, many of us returned our ballot far in advance. It's pretty fantastic that 96 percent or so of those votes can therefore be counted within 15 minutes of polls closing. That sure makes it nice for journalists scrambling to make deadline for the next day's paper.

But the real proof in the pudding is voter turnout, and Oregon did better than most this primary season. About 1.2 million Oregonians — 47 percent of registered voters — took part. Compare that to Kentucky, which held their primary election on the same day and saw around 20 percent of ballots returned.

Here in Oregon, turnout varied dramatically depending on party affiliation, however. Registered Democrats returned their ballots at a 60 percent clip, while 55 percent of Republicans did the same. Registered members of the Independent Party returned 32 percent of their ballots. Unaffiliated voters brought up the rear, however. Of 526,348 Oregonians who are not affiliated with a political party, only 94,412 returned their ballot — about 18 percent. Those are Kentucky numbers!

But can you blame unaffiliated voters? In a closed primary, they receive a pretty empty ballot. In Umatilla County, the unaffiliated had an important say in nonpartisan city council elections, a circuit court judge race and on local bond and levy issues. But they had no say on partisan races that get much more media attention: president, for instance, governor and state senators and representatives.

The importance of local races

compared to national ones is another issue. We would argue a local city councilor or judge will have a greater effect on your life than most presidents ever will.

But we digress. In this editorial, we are supporting an open primary system.

It's the best way to increase that already solid voting rate. Better even than the motor voter law, which

Unaffiliated voters returned their ballots at a clip of just 18 percent.

put ballots into the hands of Oregonians whether they wanted them or not. The jury is still out on whether that law was worth the time and effort. The 1.2 million votes cast could be a record for an Oregon primary, but because of net migration,

it doesn't mean much. The same percentage of voters are doing their duty, and the same percentage are not.

Oregon's voting laws are, thankfully, created with the thought of getting as many ballots to as many people as possible. And also to give people the time to fit a trip to the courthouse into their busy lives. Or, if their lives are too busy or otherwise encumbered, they can drop their ballots in the mail from the convenience of their own front door.

But in primary elections, the ability to choose which candidate you want to back this election in each race — not requiring you register before ballots are sent out and then un-registering once you've cast your vote — is another piece of the electoral puzzle that Oregon should be leading the nation in completing.

Opening the vote even more would siphon power from the parties, especially the big two, and re-enfranchise a whole lot of would-be voters.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

OUR VIEW

If it weren't so serious, bathroom bills would be a joke

The Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader

The movement to ban students from using restrooms that conform to their gender identity is a solution in search of a problem. There is no evidence, no data that these young people present a threat to their fellow students or anyone else.

However, it's a solution that can cause lots of problems and a great deal of pain.

Transgender people are much more likely to be victims of sexual violence. Forcing them to use restrooms set aside for them or for those of the gender with which they don't identify is akin to placing a target on their backs.

Henry Brousseau hated using the unisex bathroom in his public high school in Louisville before it adopted a policy allowing students to use the restroom of their gender identity. Born a girl, he had identified as a male for three years when he spoke to a Kentucky Senate panel last year.

"I was outing myself every time I had to go in there," he said. Using that unisex bathroom put him in the crosshairs of potential harassers, marking him as something other than the "normal kid" he wanted to be.

Henry's concerns are at the heart of the U.S. Justice Department's battle with North Carolina over HB2, the law just passed in a special session to overrule a fairness ordinance in Charlotte and compel public schools to make students use the bathrooms of the gender identity assigned to them at birth.

The Justice Department sued North Carolina, saying HB2 violates civil rights. Friday, Justice joined the Department of Education in a joint letter to schools saying they must assure all students, including transgender students,

"can attend school in an environment free from discrimination based on sex." Implicit is that schools that violate this principle risk losing federal funding.

This is not a departure from previous federal guidance, nor is it new to many schools. Atherton High in Louisville, where Henry attended, adopted a policy in 2014 allowing students to use the bathroom of their gender identity. Atherton principal Thomas Aberli told the *Louisville Courier-Journal* Friday that the new policy had been a "non-issue." "Students feel safe and that we value the diversity in our school and see it as a strength rather than divisive."

Aberli acknowledged that changing mindsets about gender identity can be difficult but "as leaders we must do our research" to understand the issue and the impact of discrimination on students.

Not feeling accepted takes a tremendous toll. Transgender kids attempt and commit suicide at a greater rate than their peers, and they miss school more often.

If it weren't so serious, these bathroom bills would be ridiculous. Politicians whine that a bullying federal government is trying to force its values on states while state legislatures try to force their values on their own cities.

And of course these laws are unenforceable. Would a bathroom monitor stand outside every door, demanding a valid copy of a birth certificate or inspecting genitalia before kids can enter? Or should students use their cellphones to spy on their peers inside stalls?

But neither human dignity nor common sense is enough to stop those who want to raise money or bolster political careers by demonizing transgender students who just want to be themselves.

OTHER VIEWS



CALECARTEONS

THE THREE STOOGES

While Bill Clinton rolls, George W. Bush unable, unwilling to help GOP

Bill Clinton has had his problems lately, but there's no doubt the former president is the best booster the Democratic Party has had since leaving office in January 2001. Even now, although he's clearly slowing down, Clinton is the party's most effective surrogate for wife Hillary.

Republicans haven't had the same luck. The only two-term GOP president in the last generation, George W. Bush, has stayed mostly out of politics in the seven years since he left the White House.

Bush's absence has caused some hard feeling among Republican politicians who wish they had a popular ex-president to bring more money and attention to GOP candidates. On the other hand, they know Bush's troubled time in office permanently diminished his post-presidential status. And now, to top it off, Bush, along with his father, former President George H.W. Bush, has taken the extraordinary step of refusing to endorse the presidential candidate of his own party.

In short, facing a difficult general election campaign and in need of all the help it can get, the GOP's ex-president situation is a mess.

George W. Bush left office with a job approval rating of just 28 percent after 9/11, two wars, and an economic collapse. He has since regained much of his popularity with Republicans. But even within his own party, Bush's status is shaky.

On Feb. 15, Bush broke his rule against campaigning to travel to South Carolina to appear at a rally on behalf of his brother Jeb. The Jeb Bush campaign was already in its final days, and there was nothing W. could do to save it. But W. still got a rousing reception.

Before the rally began, when the master of ceremonies asked the crowd, "Are y'all ready to see the president?" a huge roar went up. They weren't cheering for Jeb. The audience that W. attracted was by far the biggest of Jeb's campaign.

But at a Republican debate just a couple of days earlier, Donald Trump, who has criticized George W. Bush's presidency throughout the campaign, slammed the war in Iraq as "a big, fat mistake." Then Trump went further to say that George W. Bush "lied" the nation into war.

"They said there were weapons of mass destruction, there were none," Trump said. "And they knew there were none."

Jeb Bush stood haplessly by, unable to defend either himself or his brother.

So were South Carolina Republicans outraged by Trump — did they take offense on behalf of George W. Bush? Not really. Republicans I talked to at the W. rally were evenly split on whether the war was a disaster, and even though most didn't agree with Trump's assertion that Bush lied, they weren't



BYRON YORK
Comment

up in arms about it. And a few days later, Trump won the South Carolina primary.

It was a concise lesson in the ambiguities of George W. Bush's legacy for Republicans.

On the other hand, Bush could have helped his party by appearing at fundraisers and other events where an ex-president — even an ex-president with a troubling legacy — would still be a big draw. His refusal to do so has left some resentments.

Katon Dawson, a former chairman of the South Carolina Republican party, has no complaints about Bush's treatment of the state while in the White House. But afterward has been a different story.

"He was gracious to South Carolina — eight visits, raised us money, wonderful access to the White House," said Dawson. "But then he went home and retired. We've asked him (to come), and the answer is no. The first time we saw him was when he came to bail his brother Jeb out."

Now Bush is likely to make relations with Republicans around the country even more difficult by refusing to support the

The refusal to support Trump makes Bush and his family look like they are putting personal interests over the party.

GOP nominee. Some anti-Trump conservatives cheered the move, but state Republican parties are coming around to the reality of a Trump nomination.

But how could Bush support the candidate who slapped down his brother and trashed his own White House record? That would be a stretch even for a nimble politician.

Still, the refusal to support Trump makes Bush and his family look like they are putting personal interests over the party. And in the end, some Republicans wonder whether that might end up helping Trump.

"The ruling class, the establishment folks, the Nantucket-Kennebunkport-Lake Winnepesaukee crowd is opposed to Trump," said Curt Anderson, a top strategist for the Bobby Jindal campaign who is not part of any campaign now. "Trump is from a lower caste, he's too loud at dinner parties. I would be surprised to learn that their refusal to endorse is based on ideological concerns of any kind."

In the end, the Bush factor is too complicated to compute. A former president who is unpopular with many voters but popular with donors; who is pulled in different directions by family and party loyalty; who shies away from politics while his Democratic counterpart still draws crowds and moves voters.

Some Republicans like to send around a photo of a smiling Bush with the caption "Miss me yet?" The problem is, there's no clear answer.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner.

"I'M CONFIDENT THIS 'SECURITY INQUIRY' WON'T LEAD TO A 'PRO FORMA CITATION OF ERROR!'"

"IT'S CALLED AN 'INDICTMENT.'"

