

O

EAST OREGONIAN

PINION

KATHRYN B. BROWN
Publisher

DANIEL WATTENBURGER
Managing Editor

TIM TRAINOR
Opinion Page Editor

Founded October 16, 1875

OUR VIEW

Voters’ pamphlets have a cost, but a huge benefit

Ever picked up your ballot, looked through the list of candidates and wondered who to vote for? If so, you are not alone. When given a choice between Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton or a third-party presidential candidate, it’s likely that you’ll have an opinion.

But what if you live in an area of Eastern Oregon with an elected sewer board or fire district commission? You might know some candidates — after all, they are your neighbors. But they may just be names.

One way to help remedy that is a voters’ pamphlet.

On even-numbered years, our coastal neighbors in Clatsop County put together a useful publication that highlights candidates and the issues on the ballot. Often it is inserted in the Oregon Voters’ Pamphlet, one of the most valuable inventions this state has ever known.

Starting in 2001, Clatsop County also provided voters’ pamphlets in odd-numbered election years,

which didn’t include primaries or general elections for state and federal candidates, at a cost of more than \$5,000. But it discontinued the practice two years later because many candidates — apparently leery of fees and paperwork — did not submit information for inclusion.

Some engaged citizens want to change that. The Clatsop County Board of Commissioners seems close to a consensus that it’s a good idea — for just about every election.

The discussion gave us cause for optimism. This revival of interest has Clatsop County administration reviewing how to make it happen.

The price tag varies according to the scale of the election, and by Oregon law the costs are passed on to the agencies whose board members are being elected. In addition to their filing fee, candidates can opt to pay extra to have their photo and supporting materials published in the pamphlet.

American-style democracy is the greatest successful experiment in



Election workers count ballots in Astoria in 2016.

EO File Group photo

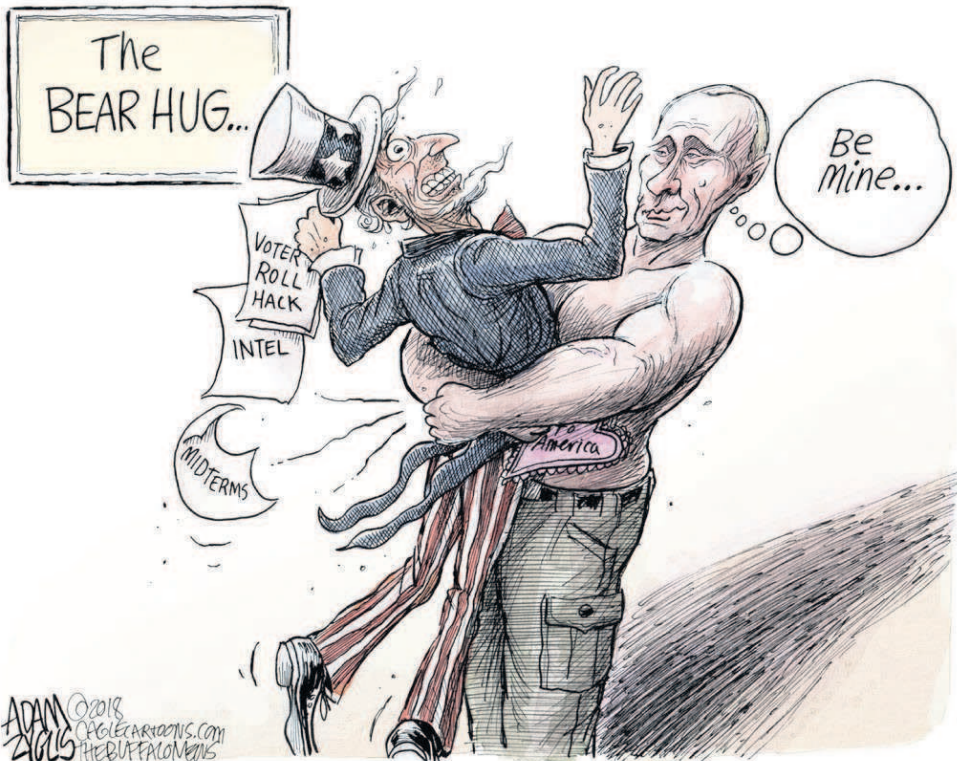
the history of Western civilization. It’s admired around the world for its openness.

But informed and engaged citizens are essential for this system to flourish. And, as speakers pointed out at the discussion last month, voting is a learned habit (and a good one).

It comes with a cost, of course. But we believe every dollar spent in this area is an investment in two important assets:

displaying transparency in government and creating informed voters. Both will always crucially important to the civic well-being of our nation. Apathy, reflected in low voter turnouts, is never healthy.

If this experiment works on the coast, it’s worth considering here in Eastern Oregon, where encouragement of educated voters and transparent candidates is as important as ever.



OTHER VIEWS

What explains the FBI’s deep faith in Trump dossier author?

One of the most remarkable takeaways from the new documents released in the Trump-Russia investigation is the degree to which FBI officials were determined to believe Trump dossier author Christopher Steele — even after it became clear he had lied to them.

In their drive to win a warrant to wiretap sometime Trump volunteer adviser Carter Page — along with Paul Manafort, one of only two Trump figures known to be wiretapped in the investigation — the bureau rested most of its case on Steele’s information, and the officials who filed the warrant application seemed resolved to believe Steele even after his credibility came into question.



BYRON YORK
Comment

The new document is the (mostly) unredacted version of the criminal referral of Steele sent to the Justice Department by Senate Judiciary Committee chairman Charles Grassley and subcommittee chairman Lindsey Graham. Like the earlier House Intelligence Committee memo, the Grassley-Graham referral shows that the FBI “relied heavily” on the dossier in its effort to convince the secret Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act court to give permission to wiretap Page. “The bulk of the application consists of allegations against Page that were disclosed to the FBI by Mr. Steele and are also outlined in the Steele dossier,” the referral said.

In part, the FBI trusted Steele because it had to; the bureau had no other evidence that would have sufficed to win a warrant to wiretap Page. “The application appears to contain no additional information corroborating the dossier allegations against Mr. Page,” the Grassley-Graham referral said.

The FBI also placed so much faith in Steele because he was a former British spy — a fellow professional — who had worked with the bureau a few years earlier in the world soccer corruption investigation.

But there were two problems with Steele’s credibility, according to the referral. The first was the lack of corroborating evidence. The other was convincing evidence that Steele lied to the FBI.

The credibility issue focused on whether Steele shared his dossier allegations with the press. When, in the late summer of 2016, the FBI asked Steele to join the Trump investigation — an extraordinary move, given that it was the middle of a presidential campaign and Steele was being paid by the Hillary Clinton campaign — one obvious condition was that Steele not share his information with the press.

Then, on Sept. 23, 2016, Yahoo News published an article that was obviously based on Steele’s dossier information. That seemed a clear violation of Steele’s

agreement with the FBI. What to do? Steele denied to the FBI that he had done that. In turn, the FBI denied to the FISA court that Steele had talked to Yahoo.

But in fact, Steele himself had provided the information to the press. In September, he personally briefed reporters from Yahoo, the *Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, CNN, and the New Yorker. In October, he did it again — the *Post* reported that Steele was “visibly agitated” in an anti-Trump fervor during his second visit to the paper. Also in October, Steele added a briefing for the left-wing publication Mother Jones.

That was a lot of talking to the press. But the FBI denied Steele’s press contacts in the surveillance application. Then, on Oct. 31, Mother Jones published an article clearly based on Steele’s information. Reading it, the FBI could no longer pretend that its valuable informant was not also sharing his anti-Trump information with the press. So the FBI formally terminated its agreement to work with Steele.

But what to tell the court? Could the FBI say, “Oh, this guy who provided the bulk of our case against Carter Page has lied to us?”

In its next statement to the court, the bureau conceded it had ended its relationship with Steele because of his “unauthorized disclosure of information to the press.” But the FBI had an excuse.

The FBI explained that Steele was so upset about the FBI’s re-opening of the Clinton email investigation that, in his anger, he took his information to reporters.

The story wasn’t true. No matter how angry Steele might have been about the re-opening of the Clinton investigation, the fact is, Steele talked to the press — *Post*, *Times*, New Yorker, CNN, Yahoo — before the Clinton investigation was re-opened. That had nothing to do with the FBI.

Still, the FBI kept faith. The bureau vouched for Steele and his information without verification and without fully grappling with the question of Steele’s honesty. “The FBI relied on admittedly uncorroborated information, funded by and obtained for Secretary Clinton’s presidential campaign, in order to conduct surveillance of an associate of the opposing candidate,” the Grassley-Graham referral said. “It did so based on Mr. Steele’s personal credibility and presumably having faith in his process of obtaining the information.”

Top FBI officials wanted to believe Steele. They needed to believe Steele. So they believed Steele.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.

OTHER VIEWS

Health care as a ‘right’ is costly, empty promise

The Eugene Register-Guard

Everyone ought to have health care. Everyone ought to have a job, too — and housing, and healthy breakfasts, and safe neighborhoods. Oregonians should not have a constitutional right to any of these things, however, unless the state is prepared to ensure that they are provided.

The state is in no position to make such guarantees, yet on Tuesday the House of Representatives voted to place a measure on the November ballot that, if approved by voters, would add the right to health care to the Oregon Constitution.

House Joint Resolution 203 proposes the following constitutional amendment: “It is the obligation of the state to ensure that every resident of Oregon has access to cost-effective, medically appropriate and affordable health care as a fundamental right.” The resolution passed on a party-line vote, with all 35 Democrats in support and all 25 Republicans in opposition. It now goes to the Senate.

The Legislative Counsel’s office doesn’t know whether HJR 203 is a costly promise, or an empty one: “Within the range of options available to the Legislative Assembly to ensure access to health care,” the office wrote in its analysis, “one could imagine mechanisms that would have

minimal financial impact on the state as well as mechanisms that would have enormous financial consequences for the state.”

It all depends on how many weasel words lawyers could find in a constitutional amendment declaring health care to be a fundamental right. It might be argued

that language in HJR 203 doesn’t actually guarantee health care, but “access to health care — so the state could fulfill its obligation by publishing a directory of clinics and hospitals.

Others, however, would argue that if voters approve the amendment, their clear intent is that everyone should have health care, and that the state must pay the cost for anyone who doesn’t have it. The League of

Women Voters of Oregon, a reliable ally of legislators seeking to expand access to health care, said it could not support HJR 203 because of its creation of an implied state responsibility.

If the amendment contained in HJR 203 does not bind the state to provide health care, it’s a piece of feel-good legislation that would add clutter to the state Constitution. If it would create an actual right to health care, Oregonians should determine the cost, and figure out how to pay it, before making the promise.

Either way, the Senate should let HJR 203 die.

It’s a piece of feel-good legislation that would add clutter to the state Constitution.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to managing editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.