Primary turnout the lowest since 1964

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Voter turnout was modest for Tuesday's primary election.

Observers say the turnout figures, part of a long-term downward trend in voter participation in Oregon, could have also been affected by the state's recent implementation of automatic voter registration, which swelled the voter rolls considerably.

About 33 percent of registered Oregon voters cast a ballot in Tuesday's primary, according to preliminary numbers from the Oregon Secretary of State's Office.

That's lower than turnout has been in any Oregon primary since 1964.

According to Jim Moore, director of the Tom McCall Center for Policy Innovation at Pacific University, voter turnout in Oregon has been steadily moving downward since the 1968 election, a high point, where 72.8 percent of voters participated.

"There are, of course, bumps in the road, but it's basically a long-term downward trend, and it's hard to say where we are now, except on that trend," Moore said.

The 2016 primary, with both major parties in contentious presidential nominating fights, garnered a 54 percent turnout. But primary elections in midterm years such as 2018 — where there isn't a contest for U.S. president on the ballot — don't tend to generate enthusiastic turnout.

"The only thing worse would be a special election held in January of an oddly-numbered year, where you'd get lower turnout," said Paul Gronke, a professor of political science at Reed College and director of the Early Voting Information Center.

Participation also appears to vary between political parties.

A slightly greater share of registered Democrats and Republicans turned out than did in the last midterm primary, in 2014.

Early figures from the Secretary of State's Office show that about 43 percent of registered Democrats voted in Tuesday's election, while about 46 percent of registered Republicans cast a ballot. Both those rates of participation are slightly higher than they were in 2014.

The rate of participation among members of other parties — including the Independent Party of Oregon — held steady at about 24 percent between 2014 and 2018.

Meanwhile, participation among non-affiliated voters decreased significantly from 2014 to 2018 — from 20.3 percent to 13.6 percent.

That's likely prompted by a recent influx of non-affiliated voters who were registered through the state's new automatic voter registration law, which went into effect in early 2016.

That means that Oregonians who have a qualifying interaction at the DMV are now automatically registered to vote. During that process, they can either opt out of registration, select a political party, or do nothing and be automatically registered as a non-affiliated voter.

The resulting growth in the number of registered voters, in turn, could also have depressed overall turnout numbers in an off-year. In 2014, 35.9 percent of registered voters cast a ballot; in 2010, 41.6 percent; and in 2006, 38.6 percent.

"I would hesitate to make any assertions about trajectory of turnout, because we have added in Oregon Motor Voter registrants," Gronke said, "And so they will almost by definition pull down our overall turnout numbers, for good reason: we've added people into the registration system that were previously sort of detached from the political system."

"It's sort of bouncing around," said Gronke of turnout, "So this does look like a low point, but it's going to be 2020 until we'll really be able to tell."

Genna Martin/seattlepi.com via AP, File

In this Sept. 2017, file photo, the Eagle Creek wildfire burns on the Oregon side of the Columbia River Gorge near Cascade Locks.

Teen who ignited massive fire may have to repay $37 million

HOOD RIVER (AP) — A teenager who started a huge wildfire in the scenic Columbia River Gorge in Oregon could owe more in restitution that he will earn in a lifetime.

Eleven requests for restitution totaling almost $37 million have been submitted to a court. That covers the costs of firefighting, repair and restoration to the gorge and damage to homes.

At a hearing Thursday, the lawyer for the 15-year-old defendant urged Hood River County Judge John Olson to impose a "reasonable and rational" amount of restitution. The attorney, Jack Morris, said ordering a boy who is indigent to pay $37 million is "absurd."

The judge said he has reviewed prior juvenile restitution cases in Oregon, and the largest figure he could find was for $114,000. He said he needed more time to review the case, and would issue a written ruling, *The Oregonian*/OregonLive reported.

"It is an extraordinary amount of restitution being sought," Olson said.

The teen from Vancouver, Washington, did not attend the hearing. He pleaded guilty in February to reckless burning of public and private property and other charges. Olson sentenced him to community service and probation, and the boy had to write more than 150 letters of apology to those affected by the fire that burned 75 square miles.

The teen said he threw one firework that exploded in the air along a trail and a second one that had a longer fuse and ignited brush when it hit the ground.

The flames spread quickly, forcing evacuations and the extended shutdown of a major interstate highway. Beyond the temporary inconveniences, the fire blackened the crown jewel of an outdoors-loving region for years to come.

The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area attracts more than 3 million tourists a year and holds North America's largest concentration of waterfalls. The fast-moving blaze ravaged popular hiking trails and marred stunning vistas.

Anger at the boy was so intense that authorities withheld his name to protect his safety. He's listed in court papers as A.B.

"I get to look at torched Angel's Rest every day. It will never be the same," farmer Paul Smith said before Thursday's hearing, referring to a bluff. "You can't financially quantify the damage he's done."

The U.S. Forest Service is seeking $21 million in payments and the Oregon Department of Transportation wants $12.5 million. The other requests for restitution range from $4,563 to $1.6 million.

The restitution is solely the responsibility of the teen, not his parents, who came to the U.S. from Ukraine.

State law allows the Oregon Department of Revenue to garnishee the teen's bank accounts or paychecks. If he's due refunds on his tax returns, the state could take those. If he wins the lottery, the state also could collect all of his winnings.

Hood River County District Attorney John Sewell said state law gives the judge some leeway in restitution cases, such as halting payments after 10 years if the teen stays out of trouble or deciding not to garnish wages.

"It's not as draconian and absolutist as defense argues," Sewell said.

Corrections

The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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AccuWeather Forecast

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TODAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
Cooler; a shower this afternoon	Partly sunny and pleasant	A t-storm in spots in the p.m.	A t-storm in spots in the p.m.	Partly sunny
PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
65° 52°	72° 50°	76° 56°	75° 53°	79° 58°
HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
71° 54°	76° 52°	80° 59°	79° 56°	85° 60°

ALMANAC

PENDLETON

through 3 p.m. yesterday

TEMPERATURE

	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	77°	54°
Normals	71°	47°
Records	97° (2008)	33° (1917)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.02"
Month to date	0.60"
Normal month to date	0.66"
Year to date	6.02"
Last year to date	9.13"
Normal year to date	5.77"

HERMISTON

through 3 p.m. yesterday

TEMPERATURE

	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	82°	58°
Normals	73°	47°
Records	95° (2008)	34° (1943)

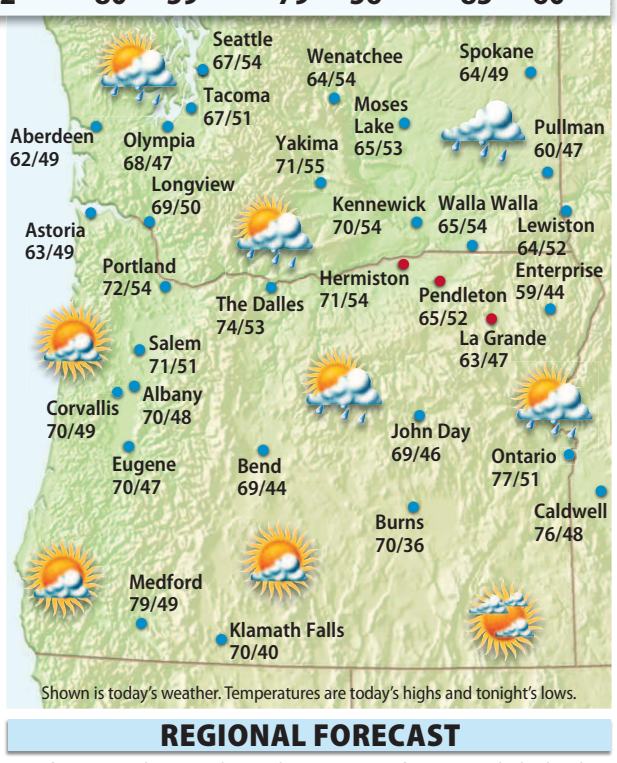
PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.05"
Month to date	0.91"
Normal month to date	0.62"
Year to date	4.96"
Last year to date	6.31"
Normal year to date	4.61"

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today	5:21 a.m.
Sunset tonight	8:23 p.m.
Moonrise today	8:28 a.m.
Moonset today	none

First	Full	Last	New
May 21	May 29	June 6	June 13



Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.

REGIONAL FORECAST

Coastal Oregon: Partly sunny today. Mainly clear tonight, except mostly cloudy in the south.

Eastern and Central Oregon: Times of clouds and sun today; a passing shower.

Western Washington: Times of clouds and sun today.

Eastern Washington: Mostly cloudy today; showers around, but rain and drizzle in the mountains.

Cascades: Sun and some clouds today; a shower in spots across the north. Partly cloudy tonight.

Northern California: Low clouds followed by sunshine at the coast today; mostly sunny elsewhere.

REGIONAL CITIES

	Today Hi	Lo	W	Sat. Hi	Lo	W
Astoria	63	49	pc	64	50	pc
Baker City	67	43	pc	71	45	pc
Bend	69	44	pc	70	48	pc
Brookings	60	47	pc	61	48	pc
Burns	70	36	pc	71	46	pc
Enterprise	59	44	c	66	44	pc
Eugene	70	47	pc	73	48	pc
Heppner	64	49	pc	70	50	pc
Hermiston	71	54	c	76	52	pc
John Day	69	46	pc	71	48	pc
Klamath Falls	70	40	pc	71	45	pc
La Grande	63	47	c	69	47	pc
Meacham	60	45	c	67	44	pc
Medford	79	49	pc	79	54	pc
Newport	59	48	pc	59	48	pc
North Bend	61	50	pc	62	50	pc
Ontario	77	51	pc	79	52	pc
Pasco	70	53	c	74	50	pc
Pendleton	65	52	c	72	50	pc
Portland	72	54	pc	77	54	pc
Redmond	70	42	pc	73	46	pc
Salem	71	51	pc	75	51	pc
Spokane	64	49	sh	65	48	pc
Ukiah	60	42	pc	66	44	pc
Vancouver	70	51	pc	75	52	pc
Walla Walla	65	54	c	71	53	pc
Yakima	71	55	c	73	51	pc

WORLD CITIES

	Today Hi	Lo	W	Sat. Hi	Lo	W
Beijing	82	58	s	82	56	c
Hong Kong	90	82	c	91	81	t
Jerusalem	92	69	s	94	68	s
London	64	46	s	70	46	s
Mexico City	84	57	pc	83	58	pc
Moscow	75	57	t	69	48	t
Paris	65	44	s	66	49	s
Rome	74	57	pc	75	59	s
Seoul	70	53	pc	74	53	s
Sydney	67	51	s	66	50	s
Tokyo	80	69	pc	78	58	r

WINDS

(in mph)	Today	Saturday
Boardman	NW 6-12	NNE 4-8
Pendleton	WNW 6-12	NW 4-8

UV INDEX TODAY

8 a.m.	10 a.m.	Noon	2 p.m.	4 p.m.	6 p.m.
1	1	3	3	2	1

0-2, Low **3-5**, Moderate **6-7**, High; **8-10**, Very High; **11+**, Extreme

The higher the **AccuWeather.com UV Index™** number, the greater the need for eye and skin protection.

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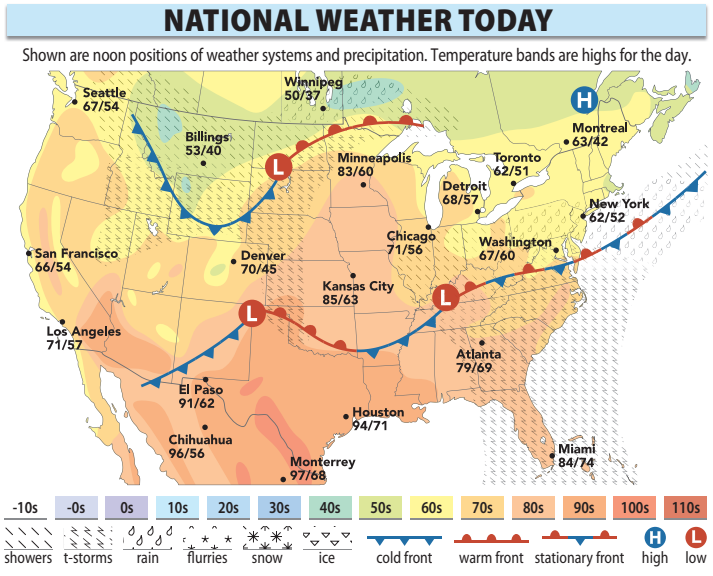
NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.



National Summary: Areas of rain and thunderstorms are forecast from Florida to the Ohio Valley and mid-Atlantic today. Showers and storms will riddle the interior Northwest, while more severe storms rattle the Plains.

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 104° in Presidio, Texas **Low** 18° in Bodie State Park, N.M.

NATIONAL CITIES

	Today Hi	Lo	W	Sat. Hi	Lo	W
Albuquerque	82	53	s	83	55	pc
Atlanta	79	69	t	83	69	pc
Atlantic City	62	55	r	68	64	r
Baltimore	65	56	r	78	68	r
Billings	53	40	sh	56	41	pc
Birmingham	81	67	t	88	69	pc
Boise	73	49	pc	76	54	pc
Boston	56	48	pc	56	53	r
Charleston, SC	79	71	t	82	71	t
Charleston, WV	76	65	t	81	65	t
Chicago	71	56	pc	72	53	pc
Cleveland	70	59	r	78	60	t
Dallas	95	73	s	93	72	s
Denver	70	45	t	49	41	sh
Detroit	68	57	pc	72	59	sh
El Paso	91	62	s	91	60	pc
Fairbanks	63	47	pc	66	43	pc
Fargo	78	47	t	65	42	c
Honolulu	85	72	s	85	74	pc
Houston	94	71	s	92	75	s
Indianapolis	73	64	t	81	65	pc
Jacksonville	83	68	t	84	68	t
Kansas City	85	63	pc	87	63	t
Las Vegas	91	71	s	93	72	s
Little Rock	88	68	pc	92	70	pc
Los Angeles	71	57	pc	71	59	pc
Louisville	81	68	t	85	70	pc
Memphis	82	69	sh	92	73	s
Miami	84	74	t	80	74	t
Milwaukee	64	53	s	63	48	c
Minneapolis	83	60	pc	75	50	c
Nashville	82	66	t	88	68	pc
New Orleans	92	72	pc	93	73	s
New York City	62	52	r	63	62	r
Oklahoma City	88	69	pc	90	63	s
Omaha	86	61	pc	80	56	r
Philadelphia	62	52	r	71	68	r
Phoenix	94	70	s	96	71	s
Portland, ME	60	41	pc	54	49	r
Providence	60	50	c	59	57	r
Raleigh	78	67	t	80	68	t
Rapid City	72	39	pc	52	37	c
Reno	72	51	pc	73	51	pc
Sacramento	81	54	s	79	52	pc
St. Louis	76	64	c	90	71	pc
Salt Lake City	70	51	t	72	52	pc
San Diego	67	60	pc	66	60	pc
San Francisco	66	54	pc	64	54	pc
Seattle	67	54	pc	73	54	pc
Tucson	92	60	s	93	61	s
Washington, DC	67	60	r	79	70	r
Wichita	85	68	pc	91	59	t

Weather (W): **s**-sunny, **pc**-partly cloudy, **c**-cloudy, **sh**-showers, **t**-thunderstorms, **r**-rain, **sf**-snow flurries, **sn**-snow, **i**-ice.