

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OTHER VIEW

Five measures headed to ballot

Corvallis Gazette-Times

Oregon voters will face just five statewide ballot issues in the November election, the lowest number in nearly four decades and a surprising development in a state that in recent years hasn't been shy about pushing initiatives onto the ballot.

All five measures take on hot-button issues in Oregon, and at least four of them likely will draw plenty of attention in the fall campaign. (The exception likely will be Measure 102, which would allow local governments to issue bonds to pay for affordable housing projects that involve nonprofits or other nongovernmental entities. Our guess is that measure is unlikely to be particularly controversial.)

That won't be the case for the other ballot measures. Consider these:

- Measure 103 is a constitutional amendment that would bar new taxes on groceries, including food and soda, as well as freeze the state's corporate minimum tax for supermarkets.

- Measure 104 is a constitutional amendment that would require a three-fifths supermajority for legislation that raises revenue through changes in tax exemptions, credits and deductions.

- Measure 105 would overturn the 1987 sanctuary law that prohibits state and local police from enforcing immigration law if a person's only violation is being in the country illegally.

- Measure 106 is a constitutional amendment that would ban public funds from being spent on abortions in Oregon.

These all are questions that voters will need to consider carefully. But, still, it's easier to do that for five state measures than it is for, say, 26 measures, the load that voters faced in the 2000 election.

Since our initial editorial appeared, other political observers have weighed in on the reasons why this Oregon ballot is so light on initiatives. Some have mentioned, as we did, the various changes in signature-gathering procedures that have tended to make it more difficult to get initiatives on the ballot. We don't think this is necessarily a bad thing: It should be hard to get an initiative on the ballot, just like it should be hard to get a bill passed by the Legislature. (We often forget that a vital role for the Legislature is to stop bad ideas from becoming law; you can assess for yourself how successful Oregon's Legislature has been at that task.)

Other longtime political observers, such as former Secretary of State Phil Keisling, argue that voters are simply burned out on



AP file photo

initiatives. "The biggest thing, I think, is fatigue," Keisling told *The Oregonian*, and we suspect there's a measure of truth to that.

The Oregonian story pointed to another factor we hadn't considered: Money that used to be spent on ballot measures is flowing instead to legislative candidates. In 2016, the newspaper noted, more than \$11 million was spent on legislative races. (It works out to about \$150,000 per race, a lot of cash for a state that prides itself on its citizen Legislature.)

The Oregonian also noted that some of the conservative activists who helped spearhead initiative campaigns have been on the political sidelines in recent years.

The relatively small number of initiatives on the ballot isn't a bad thing: For one thing, it gives voters a fighting chance to consider each of the measures with greater care.

And, truth be told, many of the more complicated matters that used to be presented as ballot measures should be the province of legislators, who have the time and resources to more carefully examine complex issues during their sessions in Salem.

But there's a flip side to that: If the Legislature fails to act on the vital questions facing Oregon, this current ebb tide in statewide ballot measures likely will be short-lived.

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OTHER VIEWS

Economic issues may not factor in governor's race

Albany Democrat-Herald

It is among the most common of modern-day political advice, so much so that it's been enshrined in its own four-word mantra: "It's the economy, stupid."

The phrase was originally coined by James Carville, one of the architects of Bill Clinton's successful 1992 run against the incumbent, George H.W. Bush.

The idea behind the words is pretty simple: If the economy is doing well, that's a big advantage for an incumbent. If the economy is not doing well — and it had slipped into recession under Bush — that's potentially an opening for a challenger, as Bush learned after losing to Clinton.

The booming economy in the United States is one reason why a second Donald Trump term isn't at all out of the question, despite the president's relatively high disapproval numbers.

A similar dynamic is at work among the nation's governors, even though state economies are affected by factors considerably outside a governor's control.

So consider the case of Gov. Kate Brown: Oregon's economy is in the midst of a sustained economic boom, although the rural parts of the state have not enjoyed the full benefits of the recovery. The state Department of Employment reported last week that unemployment rates in the state were 3.9 percent in July; it marked the lowest such rate since comparable records were started in 1976.

Oregon's economy, the department reported, is growing faster than previously thought: In June and July, Oregon's nonfarm payroll employment rose by 12,000 jobs. Employment is up 2.4 percent in the last 12 months.

The construction sector of the economy,

which was hit hard during the Great Recession, is leading the economic expansion in Oregon, the state reported: Employment in the sector is up 11.2 percent in the last year, about 11,000 jobs.

Brown has other advantages as well as she seeks re-election. The biggest one: She's a Democrat in a state where Democrats holds a substantial advantage in registered voters.

So, you would think, the conventional wisdom would have her hitting the campaign trail after Labor Day with a substantial lead over her Republican opponent, Knute Buehler, and the Independent Party nominee, Patrick Starnes.

But that's not what some of the early polls suggest.

Now, granted, it's early in the election season, and there's plenty of time for new developments to emerge. But two recent polls (both, to be fair, to be taken with a grain of salt) suggest that the race at this point is essentially even. That's a far cry from an Oregon Public Broadcasting poll taken in January, which suggested that Brown enjoyed a 17-point lead.

That poll was taken well before the May primary election, and before Buehler endured what turned out to be contentious challenges from a pair of candidates to his right. Buehler's statewide name recognition undoubtedly has increased since then, so it's not as if Brown has frittered away that early lead.

But, still, the suggestion that the gubernatorial race is a tight one in a Democratic-leaning state with a booming economy is enough to make one suggest that Oregon voters are not particularly focused right now on economic issues; other issues may be more top of mind. The race could go to the candidate who speaks most effectively to those other issues.

OTHER VIEWS

Here's what makes America great

Though Bill Clinton was a far better talker than he was an orator, at least one of his sentences should be carved in stone: "There is nothing wrong with America," he said in his 1993 Inaugural Address, "that cannot be cured by what is right with America." That's a line Andrew Cuomo might want to commit to memory.

The New York governor is in the news for saying that America "was never that great." He went on to explain that the U.S. "will reach greatness when every American is fully engaged" — while complaining that Donald Trump's Make America Great Again slogan was "retrospective" and intended to return the country to darker times past.

As political gifts to the Trump 2020 campaign go, it's hard to think of one so perfectly wrapped. Fox News was all over it. So was Stephen Colbert. For conservatives, the remark is proof of moral ignominy; for liberals, of political stupidity. And it was particularly rich coming from someone whose own campaign slogan, from 2010, was, "Together, we can make New York great again."

But it's also a statement more than a few people agree with, not least among progressives Cuomo is trying to woo in his primary campaign against challenger Cynthia Nixon. So it's worth reminding ourselves of just what it is that really makes America great.

It's in that Clinton line: A capacity for adjustment, self-correction and renewal, unequalled among the nations, and inscribed in our founding charter. "Unalienable Rights." "The consent of the governed." "The pursuit of Happiness." "Created equal."

Other countries rise on strengths that ultimately become their failings, sometimes their downfall. Conquest made Rome vast, proud — and overstretched. Militarism united Germany in the late 19th century only to become the source of its catastrophes in the next century. Top-down authoritarian directives built China's factory floors and high-speed rail networks. But they also impede the bottom-up flow of information and ideas that makes economies adaptive and creative.

The U.S. has also endured reversals, crises and malaise, and committed its share of crimes. There is an extensive literature, dating to the 1780s and continuing through the present, predicting imminent doom or long-term decline. There's an equally long literature cataloging America's many

BRET STEPHENS
Comment

sins, most of them real but very few of them all that particular to us, including slavery, ethnic cleansing, territorial conquest, racism and misogyny.

But the consistent theme of American history has been one of continual overcoming by way of direct recourse to first principles — principles that are timeless and universal, even if they were laid down by hypocrites. It's how Lincoln resolved the crisis of the house divided. It's how the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments were ratified — along with the 19th. It is the basis for Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. It's how the Obergefell case on marriage equality was decided.

It's also why a record number of Americans — 75 percent, according to a Gallup poll from June — continue to believe in the benefits of immigration, despite the Trumpian assault. The American birthright belongs, potentially, to everyone. This is unprecedented. Other countries accept migrants on the basis of economic necessity or as a humanitarian gesture. Only in America is it the direct consequence of our foundational ideals.

It's easy to deprecate some of the puffery and jingoism that often go with affirmations of "American greatness." It's also easy to confuse greatness with perfection, as if evidence of our shortcomings is proof of our mediocrity.

But greatness, like happiness, lies less in the achievement than in the striving — and in the question of what we are striving for. Another foundational phrase: "A more perfect Union." What does that mean? It is both purely subjective and highly purposeful, a recognition of imperfection and the necessity of change.

By coincidence, Cuomo's remark came just a few days after the death of Nobel Prize-winning novelist V.S. Naipaul, whose 1990 speech, "Our Universal Civilization," has since been widely shared. It concludes with Naipaul's tribute to "this idea of the pursuit of happiness."

"It is an elastic idea; it fits all men," he said. "So much is contained in it: the idea of the individual, responsibility, choice, the life of the intellect, the idea of vocation and perfectibility and achievement. It is an immense human idea. It cannot be reduced to a fixed system. It cannot generate fanaticism. But it is known to exist, and because of that, other more rigid systems in the end blow away."

Want to know what makes America great, governor? Look no further.

Bret Stephens writes for the *New York Times*.