

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

The politics of districts

Oregonians trust politicians to make decisions about what taxes are collected, how taxes are spent and policies that shape lives. But should politicians be trusted with setting up voting districts?

A proposed ballot measure aims to take politicians out of political redistricting. The measure would create a citizen commission to draw the lines. Would it be more fair? That's unclear.

The new census will mean Oregon's congressional and legislative districts will be redrawn. In Oregon, the districts are now redrawn by legislators. That could be putting the fox in charge of the henhouse — at least that's what the groups supporting a citizen commission argue. The measure is backed by the League of Women Voters of Oregon, Oregon Common Cause, the Independent Party and The Taxpayer Association of Oregon.

It would work like this: It creates an independent, multipartisan commission of 12 Oregonians. They would hold public meetings across the state and draw up the boundaries in an open process. The goal is for it to be done fairly, respecting communities and less manipulated by partisanship or other politics.

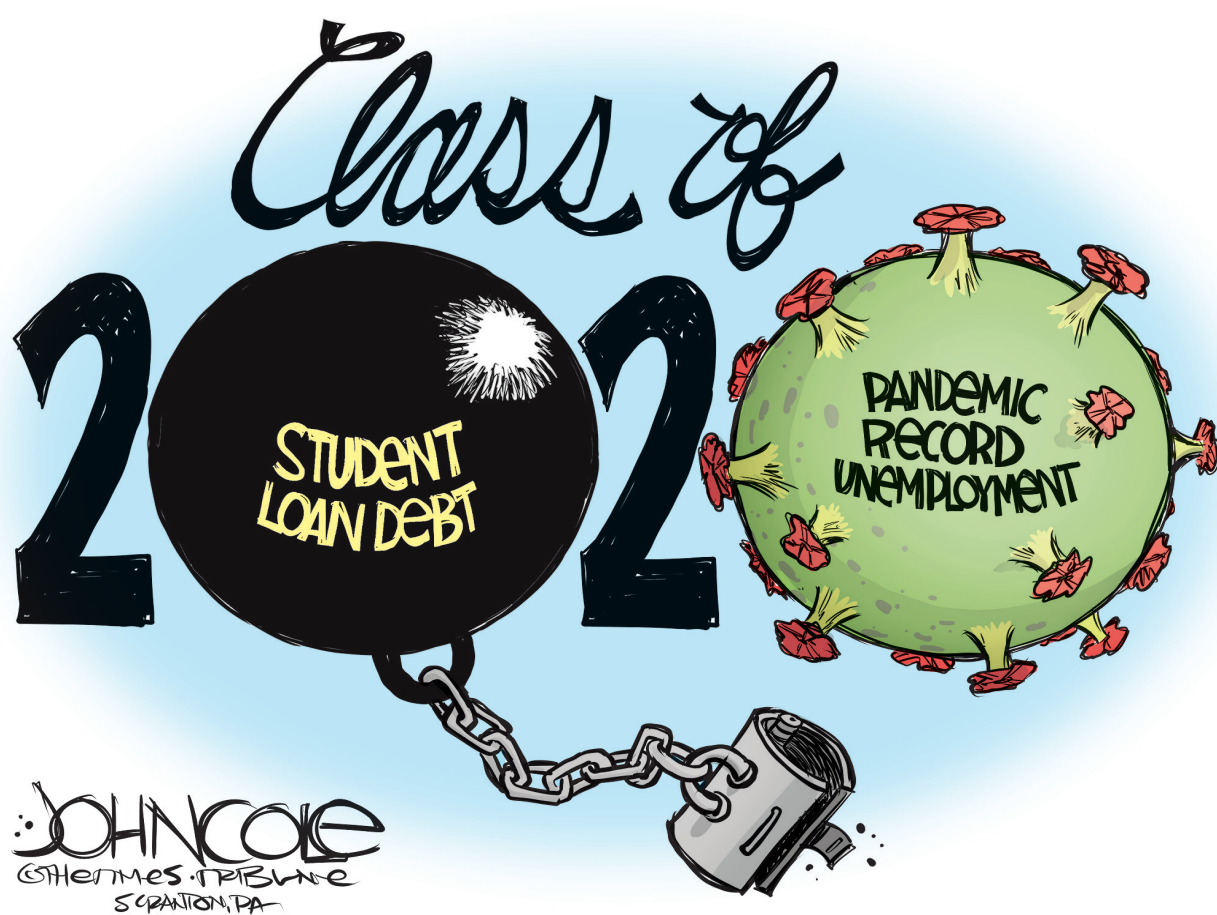
The proposal takes substantial steps to keep politicians out of it. People would apply for the commission spots. Basically, paid politicians couldn't be chosen. People who have recently run for such offices couldn't be chosen. Neither could their staff. Political consultants are barred. An individual who has given more than \$2,700 a year to any single candidate couldn't be chosen. There are also requirements to limit the members from the two largest political parties and include non-affiliated voters. From the pool of applicants, candidates for the commission would be winnowed by administrative law judges and would eventually be chosen by lot. The governor could remove someone from the commission, but only with a two-thirds majority vote of the Senate.

Gerrymandering began before it was called gerrymandering, before the country's independence. It's the idea of drawing a voting district so it will get a certain kind of candidate elected. The name was immortalized in a political cartoon satirizing a law signed by Massachusetts Gov. Elbridge Gerry in 1812. The law redrew state Senate districts to ensure Gerry's party — Thomas Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans — would be strong and John Adams' and Alexander Hamilton's Federalists would be weak. It worked. One of the districts looked a bit like a salamander. Gerrymander was born.

The U.S. Supreme Court has been reluctant to decide when partisanship goes too far in gerrymandering. It would require two things difficult for the courts: defining what is fair and divining the future. What's a clear test for fairness? There are many different ways to measure what's fair. Fair to whom? Fair to what? As Chief Justice John Roberts wrote, choosing one "poses basic questions that are political, not legal." The courts would also have to look at a district and somehow know that in the future the outcomes it creates would turn out to be unfair — by some definition. It's additionally unclear that the founders intended judges to decide such things.

These days, leaning on big data, political consultants have more tools than ever to draw up districts to get an outcome they want. Does Oregon need to change? Oregonians could do nothing. If legislators are making the redistricting decisions, they can be held accountable by voters, though it would be mostly after the districts are drawn.

An independent redistricting commission creates a way to try to minimize the influence of some politicians on the process. Commissioners will still have to make choices about defining what is fair. They will still have to guess if sticking the lines in one place will produce more "fair" outcomes in the future. We don't know if the commission would be more fair. It might. It would get more Oregonians involved in making important decisions about how they are governed.



Skywarn Spotters are the National Weather Service's eyes in the community



LARRY
NIERENBERG
EYE TO THE SKY

Do you enjoy watching the weather? Are you someone who likes helping your community and keeping others safe? If you answered "Yes" to both of these questions, you may be interested in becoming a "Skywarn Spotter."

So, what exactly is a Skywarn Spotter? Skywarn is a nationwide network of between 350,000 and 400,000 volunteer storm spotters that are trained by the National Weather Service to report threatening weather when they observe it.

The Skywarn program is over 50 years old, and even with the latest technologies, such as Doppler radar, satellites and high speed computers, the National Weather Service still relies heavily on ground truth reports. Some of these reports include snowfall measurements or confirmation of a tornado on the ground, hail size measurement or to confirm heavy rainfall or flooding.

Anyone can become a Skywarn Spotter, though you must attend a training class. Volunteers include members of law enforcement and emergency management, first responders, health

care personnel, and any private citizen that just wants to help their community. Classes are offered periodically throughout the year, though are generally focused on the spring and summer. Topics covered include thunderstorm development and storm structure, tornadoes, different types of flooding, measuring snow, measuring hail, how and what to report, good and bad reports and basic severe weather safety and preparedness. All classes last about two hours and are free of charge.

Amateur radio is also part of Skywarn, though you do not have to be a HAM radio operator or have a HAM license to become a spotter.

The reports that spotters provide the National Weather Service are extremely valuable and can be lifesaving. While Eastern Oregon does not get the same type of severe weather as a place like Oklahoma, and you most likely would not be observing a large tornado or giant hail, there is still a need for spotters in this area. Radar coverage is affected by rugged terrain and a timely spotter report can be extremely beneficial in helping National Weather Service meteorologists with the issuance of warnings and getting the word out to neighboring communities. Spotter reports of flooding are also very important as flooding can be very quick to occur in narrow canyons and people may be hiking or camping nearby. Additionally, the rural nature of

most of the region often makes it difficult for us to obtain the "ground truth" or what is actually happening at a specific location. There could be hundreds of miles between where people live and having someone who could call us with a report is extremely valuable. Terrain presents another challenge, as weather can change drastically with elevation. It may be raining or snowing on one side of the mountains and on the other side it is very windy with no precipitation whatsoever.

If you think you may be interested in becoming a Skywarn Spotter, please check the National Weather Service Pendleton spotter training website at weather.gov/pdt/spotterTraining or our office's Facebook and/or Twitter pages, where we will post training class announcements as they become available.

In most years we have several in-person classes across the region and one or two classes via webinar. However, due to the special circumstances this year, all classes this spring will be via webinar. We hope to get back to some live classes in the fall, and if not by then, certainly next spring!

Larry Nierenberg is a senior forecaster for the National Weather Service in Pendleton. Nierenberg leads National Weather Service community outreach and hazardous weather preparedness and resiliency programs.

YOUR VIEWS

All lives matter

I received an urgent message from my sister on April 15, 2020, that our cousin's adult grandson, Caleb, was missing. Caleb had graduated from a Salem high school in 2019 and had started an apprenticeship program. Caleb had a history of depression, but was excited about his new prospects in life.

Then COVID-19 hit and he was let go at work. He followed all of the social distancing and stay-at-home guidelines, as did his roommate. With life interrupted, the darkness of despair began to engulf him until it consumed him. Later that day, he was found dead from a self-inflicted wound.

I consider Caleb's death COVID-19 related, though it will not appear on the daily OHA report. It is imperative

that the most vulnerable, the elderly and those with fragile health are protected from COVID-19. However, all other Oregonians should be free to choose to stay home or be able to work with safe precautions.

We flattened the COVID19 curve, now it is time to flatten the projected 6,000 suicides related to COVID-19. Let's learn from Caleb: All lives matter and work and school are essential for all of us.

Kris Peterson
Hermiston

Restrictions are there to keep everyone safe

I heard Gov. Kate Brown is in hot water because of her stay-home restrictions. She is attempting to follow federal guidelines to keep her state and country safe. The more the general

public fights these guidelines made by the federal government, the more rights and lives that are being revoked.

It is understandable by the countries' rights and freedoms being temporarily disrupted, but the federal and state agencies are trying to be considerate of everyone's well-being, both young and old. It all comes down to two options. Live or die? If you choose not to willingly help yourselves and others through this crisis, you are potentially endangering yourself and others.

The faster we look out for each other and follow the said guidelines, the sooner we can start building our country back up. If not, this pandemic that we are all dealing with will only create more damage to our society and our loved ones.

Rebecca Favorit
Pendleton

EDITORIALS

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LETTERS

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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.

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