

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Voters need to remain engaged in legislative activity

The Oregon Legislature is poised to approve yet another gun mandate and while the battle lines over such issues are clearly drawn, the real lesson for voters is they must remain involved and watchful the actions of their elected lawmaker.

Late last month, the Oregon Senate voted to approve a bill to eliminate guns carried by concealed handgun licensees from state buildings.

The new bill — House Bill 2510 — will require the storage of firearms with trigger of cable locks inside a locked container or gun room.

Input on the bill is, as expected, evenly divided. That may be the only positive element to this piece of legislation — there is no ambiguity about how people feel about it.

It is difficult to see how such a bill — which essentially reaches into a resident's private home — will withstand a court challenge on at least two specific constitutional pillars, but chances are it will gain approval.

Anti-gun bills and other pieces of legislation that tackle cultural flashpoint issues are going to be the norm going into the future and that means every voter must do all they can to stay apprised of the ambitions and workings of their elected leaders.

In this day and age that is no easy task. Especially with the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the past there was a robust system — including the media and other watchdog groups — that keep citizens informed about legislative action. The media landscape, though has changed. The number of reporters that cover the Oregon Capitol isn't as large as it once was and that can be traced to economics. That means it is up to every voter to ensure they are following what is going on at the Legislature.

Thankfully, there are paths to keep up to tabs on our lawmakers. The internet is probably the easiest way to do so, and the Oregon Legislature's website is very informative and offers a list of bills that can be easily accessed.

The world is a bigger place now. Stories, events, are occurring all the time and often take center stage over what can be viewed as boring news out of a legislative session.

But it isn't boring. At least not when it comes to certain pieces of legislation that can impact us all. That is why it is so important that voters stay informed and remain focused on what is going on at the Legislature.



Redistricting process is at the heart of democracy



DANIEL WATTENBURGER
HOMEGROWN

It's not a bad thing that we're talking about election systems in the spring of an off-election year, even if the tenor of the discussion is (unsurprisingly) decidedly partisan.

The calmer times between elections are a good opportunity for a status check to review the most recent voting season and prepare for the next. It's also a time for any investigation into election fraud, which to date has been used as a bogeyman and rallying cry without the backing of credible evidence.

If any proof arises that elections were tampered with or our systems are vulnerable, we should all demand a response. But we should also be wary of those who continually float conspiracy theories about widespread fraud and hacked systems without being able to offer up more than suggestions of malfeasance.

The reason we're talking more generally about elections now is because of recent legislation passed in Georgia and the redistricting process here in Oregon. In Georgia, where Republicans control the state Legislature and secretary of state's office, Democrats are concerned about allowing the Legislature to have stronger influence on election systems.

The new Georgia election law comes with a host of measures with the stated purpose of protecting against fraud and expanding voter access. It's hard to take that description at face value, as most of

the provisions make the act of voting more complicated and includes strange provisions like prohibiting giving food and water to people standing in line to vote. It also takes some power of election oversight from the secretary of state and gives it to the Legislature.

In Oregon, where Democrats control the state Legislature and secretary of state's office, Republicans are concerned about the redistricting process that will determine the layout of the Legislature and congressional representation for the next decade.

To be fair, in Oregon everyone is concerned about redistricting — or should be. The delays in census returns mean the decennial process will be abbreviated, potentially skipping the Legislature entirely and moving directly to the secretary of state.

Election integrity and voter access are fundamental principles that create a framework for democracy. If we can't agree on the rules, and extend some trust to one another, we won't have faith in the outcomes.

It starts with a level playing field. That means giving each voter a voice in the process and ensuring their ability to exercise that voice.

Voting districts are intended to group citizens into areas of common interest. This doesn't mean by political affiliation, and the prime examples of gerrymandering have been created by drawing lines around partisan voting blocks. There are a few fun simulators online that show how easy it is to turn a slim political advantage into a secure majority or spread influence across multiple districts to dilute a party's strength.

Because Oregon is poised to receive a sixth congressional seat, the district-draw-

ing process will affect not just Oregon's representation but the balance of the U.S. House of Representatives. And how that influence is distributed among individual voters is highly important. This is on top of the 60 House and 30 Senate districts in the Oregon Legislature that will be redrawn.

As it stands, legislators won't be able to fulfill their duty of drawing these new district maps by July 1 because they won't have the updated U.S. Census data by then. Legislative leaders are working to find a compromise that allows their input before the process is constitutionally passed to the secretary of state. But regardless of the outcome, the development of new districts will be hurried ahead of the 2022 election cycle.

There's only so much we can do now, awaiting new population tallies and dealing with pressing matters like COVID-19 and wildfire recovery. But this is a good time to again reevaluate the balance of power between our elected legislators and our electorate in general.

We all benefit by clean and clear district maps. Allowing partisan politics to skew the creation of those maps in either direction erodes faith in the process and stifles voter turnout. Oregon is a blue state, but it hasn't always been and likely won't always be. The only way to make sure Oregonians — not political parties — are the ones setting the direction is to protect the redistricting process.

Daniel Wattenburger is the former managing editor of the East Oregonian. He lives in Hermiston with his wife and children and is an account manager for Pac/West Lobby Group. Contact him at daniel-wattenburger@gmail.com.

YOUR VIEWS

When the going gets tough, Wolfe steps up

Serving on the Umatilla Electric Cooperative Board of Directors is not a glamorous job. But it's an important one.

Bryan Wolfe and the other directors have helped find the opportunities hidden within a challenging year. Our region has felt the effects of the COVID-19 and the UEC board has responded by making sure members have utilities and financial assistance, creating a business-friendly environment, and keeping electric rates low.

True leadership is tested during an emergency, and Bryan has shown his character and ability as he has helped guide UEC through 2020. As we recover from this difficult year, we need leaders like Bryan to continue to put the needs of the community first and find creative ways to serve members.

Please join me in voting for Bryan Wolfe for Umatilla Electric Cooperative District 3 director.

Steve Wallace
Hermiston

CTUIR appreciated for vaccine generosity

On behalf of the faculty, staff, and students at Blue Mountain Community College, we would like to express our utmost appreciation and gratitude to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation for making the COVID-19 vaccine available to the entire BMCC community through Yellowhawk Tribal

LETTERS DEADLINE FOR MAY 18 ELECTIONS

The *East Oregonian* does not run endorsements of more than 400 words. The *East Oregonian* will institute a deadline for letters to the editor, so we can be fair with all the letters we receive and allow for responses before Election Day, if necessary. We run the letters on a first-come, first-served basis. Please submit your endorsement letters to the editor by 5 p.m. on Friday, May 7. You can email them to editor@eastoregonian.com, or mail them to East Oregonian, c/o Andrew Cutler, 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801. We will publish our last letters on Saturday, May 15. Any letters received after the deadline will not run. Election Day is May 18.

Health Center.

BMCC is committed to providing a safe environment for our faculty, staff and students. The CTUIR's generosity in providing access to the COVID-19 vaccine puts us on the path to resume regular on-site operations and programming so that we may continue to serve the students and communities of Eastern Oregon.

BMCC values its relationship with the CTUIR and is grateful for their leadership. Thank you.

Jane Hill, chair
Blue Mountain Community College
Board of Education

Diesel bill would hurt, not help, Oregon

House Bill 3305 is a, as usual, poorly thought out bill that will help destroy agriculture business and farming in Oregon. As well, it will divert the traveling recreation public away from Oregon.

How would the public from other states get diesel fuel for their vehicles, which is not a progressive move in the other states? How does the amount of "renewable diesel" necessary to cover the total agri-

culture and timber harvest get in the pipeline? At what cost does this come? Again, only the largest companies might survive. Looks like another one of those good deals that only benefit the legislatures on the take and big businesses.

How is Oregon going to explain to all the owners of diesel-powered vehicles that their car or truck is now not worth anything more than scrap and replacing it will cost them around \$80,000 for another vehicle capable of towing or hauling heavy and large loads? The guy that proposed this bill might compare the additional pollutants resulting from vehicles that get much poorer fuel economy.

Perhaps he and the progressives might better spend their time figuring out how to house all the new immigrants and finding them jobs. I believe the state retirement issue could take up some of the "nothing to do but screw Oregon energies."

Rather than trying to dream up things that have no benefit to the public, they should wake up and try to be as productive as the hard-working public. Make America great and save Oregon from eating itself alive.

Rich Weaver
Milton-Freewater

EDITORIALS

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.

LETTERS

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 letters 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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