

Crash the party, welcome more voters

Oregonians voted last week — or at least the government counted our votes last week. Thanks to vote by mail, many of us returned our ballot far in advance. It's pretty fantastic that 96 percent or so of those votes can therefore be counted within 15 minutes of polls closing. That sure makes it nice for journalists scrambling to make deadline for the next day's paper.

EDITORIAL

Voice of the Chieftain

But the real proof in the pudding is voter turnout, and Oregon did better than most this primary season. About 1.2 million Oregonians — 52.5 percent of registered voters — took part. Compare that to Kentucky, which held their primary election on the same day and saw around 20 percent of ballots returned.

Here in Oregon, turnout varied dramatically depending on party affiliation, however. Registered Democrats returned their ballots at a 60 percent clip, while 55 percent of Republicans did the same. Registered members of the Independent Party returned 32 percent of their ballots. Unaffiliated voters brought up the rear, however. Of 526,348 Oregonians who are not affiliated with a political party, only 94,412 returned their ballot — about 18 percent. Those are Kentucky numbers.

But can you blame unaffiliated voters? In a closed primary, they receive a pretty empty ballot. In Wallowa County, the unaffiliated had an important say in a nonpartisan county commissioner election, but they had no say on partisan races that get much more media attention: president, for instance, governor and state senators and representatives.

The importance of local races compared to national ones is another issue. We would argue a local city councilor or judge will have a greater effect on your life than most presidents ever will.

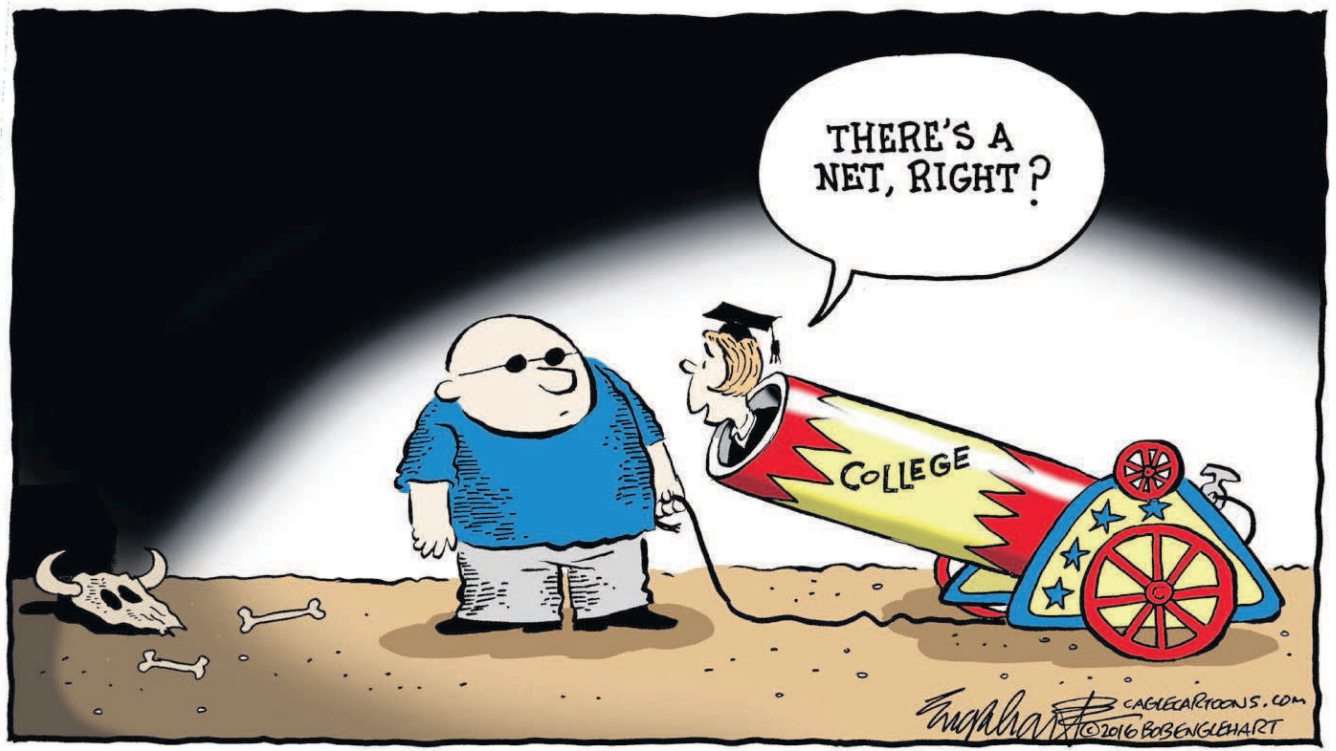
But we digress. In this editorial, we are supporting an open primary system.

It's the best way to increase that already solid voting rate. Better even than the motor voter law, which put ballots into the hands of Oregonians whether they wanted them or not. The jury is still out on whether that law was worth the time and effort. The 1.2 million votes cast could be a record for an Oregon primary, but because of net migration, it doesn't mean much. The same percentage of voters are doing their duty, and the same percentage are not.

Oregon's voting laws are, thankfully, created with the thought of getting as many ballots to as many people as possible. And also to give people the time to fit a trip to the courthouse into their busy lives. Or, if their lives are too busy or otherwise encumbered, they can drop their ballots in the mail from the convenience of their own front door.

But in primary elections, the ability to choose which candidate you want to back this election in each race — not requiring you register before ballots are sent out and then un-registering once you've cast your vote — is another piece of the electoral puzzle that Oregon should be leading the nation in completing.

Opening the vote even more would siphon power from the parties, especially the big two, and re-enfranchise a whole lot of would-be voters.



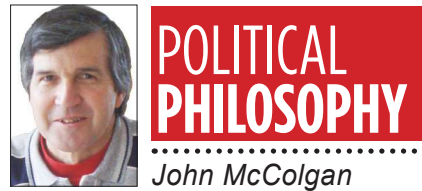
Regarding the presidential race predictions ...

Readers who missed my columns in December and January, or who suffer from amnesia, need proceed no further than this paragraph. Be assured that all my predictions regarding the presidential race have come true, more or less.

But for the rest of you, well, at least I have plenty of excuses for having been wrong. Was it my fault that the media lost their collective minds in the past year and dedicated more coverage to Donald Trump than to all other candidates combined — on both sides? I heard on NPR the other day that as of March, the amount of free media Trump has received would have cost him \$1.9 billion had he needed to purchase it. I guess there is such a thing as a free lunch, if you already happen to be a billionaire.

I still say Marco Rubio would have been the smart choice for the Republicans. He's young, smart, handsome, Hispanic, Catholic and a good debater — qualities that made him the favored choice of the Republican establishment after his strong third-place finish in Iowa. But unfortunately for Rubio, his presidential rivals saw the same assets that I identified, so Jeb Bush, Trump, Ted Cruz and especially Chris Christie all turned their fire on Rubio in New Hampshire, and he faltered badly there.

The race became even more muddled when John Kasich finished second in New Hampshire, leaving the Republicans with not one, but three competitive alternatives to Trump: Cruz, Rubio and Kasich. Soon everyone else in the race dropped by the wayside. But every time



John McColgan

someone did, Trump seemed to gobble up their share of the vote.

At least I was right about my observation that the Republican establishment truly dislikes Ted Cruz. The man who former House Speaker John Boehner disparagingly called "Lucifer in the flesh" might have finished second to Trump in votes and delegates, but he was never a popular second. So while I thought that Rubio and Cruz would battle it out and then Rubio would beat Trump, ultimately Republican voters eliminated Rubio and then chose the King of Twitter over the Prince of Darkness. Their convention and their party platform promise to provide more utterly unpredictable entertainment under Trump.

Meanwhile on the Democratic side, the media began calling the race for Hillary before the Iowa caucuses had even begun, thanks to the unique fundraising arrangement that the Clinton Super PAC, the Democratic National Committee and 33 state Democratic parties agreed to last August. Jeff Weaver, Bernie Sanders' campaign manager, has called this scheme "money laundering," and while the plan might meet legal technicalities — especially in the wake of the Citizens

United decision — Weaver's accusation as a straightforward description of what is going on, is on the money, so to speak. Not only has this system allowed individual donors to "bundle" a gift of \$350,000 to the Clinton Super PAC, it also effectively locked up more than 400 superdelegates for Hillary before any popular votes had even been cast.

As a Sanders supporter, I am frustrated not only by Clinton's superdelegate advantage, but also by the relatively minuscule media coverage that Sanders has received when compared with Clinton, and especially when compared with Trump. Throughout this primary season, and as far back as late 2015, Bernie has consistently drawn the biggest, most enthusiastic crowds of any candidate on either side. As of this writing, he has now won 20 states, compared to 24 for Hillary. And although his chances of winning the Democratic nomination are now slim at best, his favorability ratings continue to rise. So at least I was right when I predicted that the more voters got to know him, the better they would like him.

Had the national media given reasonably balanced coverage to all candidates, we might have had a Rubio-Sanders match-up in the fall. As it stands, voters will be left with the monster that the media has created facing off against a candidate that most people regard as competent, yet not very trustworthy. I still say, we could have done so much better.

John McColgan writes from his home in Joseph.

Different site needed for transitional housing project

We received notice of a public hearing on a conditional-use permit application by Point of Connection involving the former Wallowa County Family Youth Center property on the highway between Joseph and Enterprise. The notice states that the application is to "allow housing for parole and probation participants" in a rural residential zone. We request that the application be denied.

Zoning is designed, among other things, to protect or enhance the use and enjoyment of all our property. We do not believe the former youth center is an appropriate location for what amounts to a halfway house for men recently released from prison on parole or probation, or those hoping to avoid prison.

This property is surrounded by private homes, rentals and tourism-related businesses — bed and breakfast, motel, RV park and other properties vulnerable to unauthorized access. Consider some of the possible consequences of locating this type of group housing in a rural residential zone:

GUEST COLUMN

Toma and Marilyn Suarez

Potential physical risk to adults and children living, working or vacationing in the vicinity

Risk of loss or damage to personal property (burglary, robbery, larceny, vehicle theft)

Negative impact on nearby businesses catering to tourists or the general public

Negative impact on property resale values and rental rates

Setting of a precedent for R-1 zones

Who will take responsibility, assume liability and provide compensation for any losses or damages resulting from this transitional housing? Wallowa County? The applicant? The state?

The permit application cites an intent to use the property as "church/transformational housing." "Transformational" is a word used by the applicant to

describe a Christian mission. Oregon statutes define church in a few different ways, none of which appear to fit the format put forth by the applicant. The statutes also define halfway houses and transitional housing, which appear to be a better fit.

Since this is a private undertaking, apparently there are no statutory regulations governing operation, selection, supervision or security of housing of this nature and, therefore, no oversight. All of these factors appear to be whatever the applicant deems appropriate. The applicant has stated that the project will be "somewhat self-governing." We do not take comfort in that description.

We believe serious consideration must be given to the location, inherent risks and effects of transitional housing, both to the community at large and to the property and businesses adjacent to or near the property — those most directly facing potential problems.

Tom and Marilyn Suarez reside in Joseph.

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