

Vote counting could drag close races into June

By GARY A. WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown's political career began in earnest when she won the Democratic primary for a House seat by seven votes.

That's a landslide compared to Rep. Jack Zika, R-Redmond. He won his 2018 GOP primary by just two votes.

Closed 2022 primaries exclude more than 1 million nonaffiliated voters from choosing the Democratic and Republican nominees for governor, U.S. Senate, congress and the Legislature.

Several races feature large fields of candidates — 34 total in the race for governor alone.

Put together, the possibility of election squeakers is high.

Add in a new twist for 2022: The May 17 election night doesn't end at 8 p.m. as per usual. A change approved by the Legislature last year requires any ballot with a postmark of May 17 or before to be counted through May 24.

The potential for some seesawing returns and delayed final results is high.

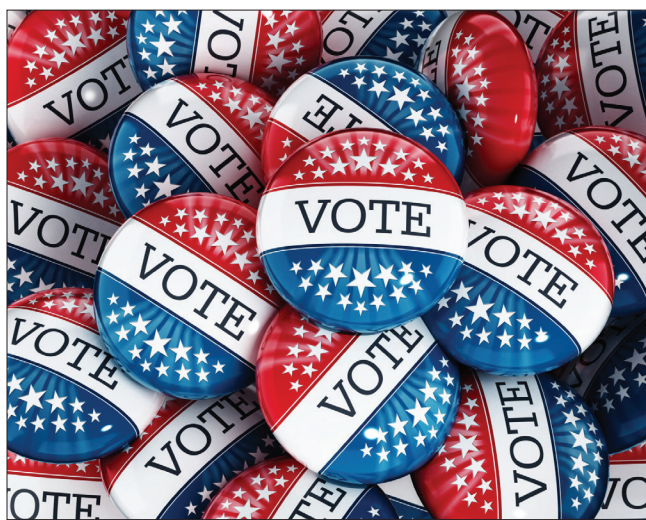
"The nightmare scenario is any race that is closer than 1.5% to 2% on election night," said Jim Moore, outreach director for Tom McCall Center for Civic Engagement at Pacific University.

With potential recounts, the final results could be delayed for a month or more. Final recount demands must be filed with the secretary of state by June 21 and an Election Day Report is due from the office on July 15.

Moore said studies of Washington state's post-mark law show relatively little wobble between the primary day and the postmark deadline.

But the 2022 primary is Oregon's first experience with a system that will mean a more drawn-out official end to the election.

Adding to worries is the balloting comes as former President Donald Trump uses the 2022 election campaigns to repeat his debunked claim that the 2020 presidential election was stolen by Pres-



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ident Joe Biden. Any snag will be cast in harsh light.

"We know this is big with Republicans," Moore said. "We'll see if there are complaints in their primary. Maybe the Republicans will say 'Wait for everything to come in.' But if a candidate says 'this looks like it could be stolen and wants an independent audit, then it could get interesting.'"

Secretary of State Shemia Fagan has mounted a major

public information campaign of television, radio and digital ads to explain the rule changes to Oregon voters in hopes of heading off complaints and misunderstandings.

"The new law could mean that very close contests will not be decided on election night," Fagan said in a statement last week. "Even if the results come in a little slower, they will be accurate."

The secretary of state's

tally of ballots on Tuesday showed 288,337 have been returned out of 2,952,330 mailed to voters.

That is 9.2% of all ballots sent to Oregon voters. The lowest return percentage of Oregon's 36 counties is Deschutes County at 7.7%. Multnomah County, which includes Portland, has returned just 8.8% of the 557,702 ballots sent to residents.

Several less populated counties have returned twice that number, with Grant County leading the count at 20.3% of ballots returned.

But the percentage of total ballots returned is misleading. The voting is likely much farther along than the secretary of state's numbers suggest.

Nonpresidential primary elections have low turnout — 33.91% in 2018. Adjusted for an increase in voters in 2022, the same turnout would put ballot returns at just under 28.8%.

The final voting tally could rise or fall on a number of factors, driving higher numbers of ballots but also a more fragmented tally.

An open governor's office, redistricting and a new con-

gressional seat has uncorked a torrent of suppressed political ambition.

With Gov. Kate Brown unable to seek reelection because of term limits, there is no incumbent on the ballot for the first time since 2010. Even that year, former Gov. John Kitzhaber was seeking (and would eventually win) a return to office. The last ballot without an incumbent — or Kitzhaber — was in 2002.

This year the race for governor has drawn 19 Republicans and 15 Democrats.

One each will remain after the primary.

Former Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, is mounting a well-financed "unaffiliated" bid that would require submitting about 24,000 valid signatures to the secretary of state by the end of August to be placed on the November ballot.

Redistricting approved last year for the 2022 election has moved congressional and legislative district lines. A high-speed game of political musical chairs played out since September involving retirements, candidates changing races, and head-on collisions between officeholders seeking new jobs.

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Oregon braces for challenging fire season

By KATY NESBITT
For EO Media Group

SALEM — Despite a long winter and cold and wet spring, Oregon fire authorities are preparing for a challenging season.

During a press conference on Monday, May 16, Gov. Kate Brown highlighted the state's challenges — despite the state's rainfall the past two months, there are many places experiencing a "mega" drought, with worse conditions expected to continue.

Early indications, Brown

said, are that southern Oregon and the east side of the Cascades along with the Columbia Gorge are especially vulnerable this year.

To alleviate some of the stress of extended drought and increasingly large wildfires, the Oregon Legislature passed Senate Bill 762 in 2019, adding funding for additional personnel and equipment, like air tankers and helicopters.

Brown claimed Oregon has one of the best response systems in the country, but the new funding will help keep resources from being maxed out when fire season arrives. The governor also stressed prevention to curb the outbreak of wildfires.

"Please be smart and careful when enjoying the outdoors to prevent tragic loss," she said. "Being prepared can mean the difference between life and death."

In the wake of fires that not only destroyed hundreds of thousands of forest and rangeland, some of Oregon's recent wildfires, especially in September 2020, left thousands homeless. Brown asked that people stay informed through outlets like oralert.gov on fire activity and evacuation orders.

"If you are asked to evacuate, please just do it," she said.

Mike Shaw, Oregon Department of Forestry's fire protection chief, said the cool, wet weather of April and May are welcome respite from the drought and

has helped put off fire season, but echoed the governor about the continued threat of wildfire across most of the state.

"We are in a very significant drought pattern, especially on the east slope of the Cascades and vast parts of eastern, southern and central Oregon," he said.

According to maps predicting the national wildfire outlook, the season will likely ramp up in mid-July and be very active in August. Travis Medema, chief deputy for the state fire marshal's office, said that is the same time period that competition for resources could be a problem.

"We are going to try and keep fires small and out of communities," he said.

The state has 305 fire departments and three incident command teams.

"We will work with local communities to bolster capacity when needed," Medema said.

With technology that predicts lightning and detects fuel moisture of grasses, live fuel like trees and dead and down material, Medema said fire crews can be pre-positioned in areas that are likely to have high fire activity.

While state and federal agencies have contracts with air support, the Oregon National Guard will also have two Blackhawk helicopters that can haul 500 gallons of water at a time and one Chinook that can fly with a 1,500-gallon bucket.

National Guard troops will be trained and ready for ground support, as well, according to Maj. Gen. Michael Stencel, the adjutant general of the Oregon National Guard.

Andrew Phelps, director of the Office of Emergency Management, said there are several state agencies coordinating efforts for the upcoming wildfire season like Oregon Department of Human Services that works with nonprofits to provide shelter and food for those who are displaced and Oregon Department of Transportation that works with the Department of Forestry cross-training employees in fire fighting and snow removal. He said the state also has a mutual aid agreement with its neighbors.

"As seasons are longer and more intense, the agencies' roles are keeping people safe," he said. "We have a shared responsibility to prepare for emergencies."

The Department of Environmental Quality's focus is on smoke management, air quality and communication, said Deputy Director Leah Feldon.

Tom Roick, DEQ air quality monitoring manager said the network of smoke monitors across Oregon is expanding. He said his department received money to install 20 new monitors. The information will be shared to through the state's air quality index on the OregonAIR app and <https://oregon-smoke.blogspot.com/>.

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Imnaha Christain Fellowship
- May 19, 6:00- 7:30 PM
Troy School
- June 2, 6:00 - 7:30 PM
Cloverleaf Hall in Enterprise
- June 16, 6:00 - 7:30 PM
Senior Center in Wallowa
- June 30, 6:00-7:30 PM
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