

Opinion

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GUEST EDITORIALS

A lesson for voters

Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

Under Oregon law, every vote counts. It counts, that is, unless a ballot is not turned in by 8 p.m. on Election Day. Late ballots are not counted, no matter what voters' intent.

During the 2018 general election, nearly 100 Multnomah County voters learned that lesson the hard way. They learned something else, as well — if you want your vote to count, don't leave the task of delivering your ballot to someone else.

That's what led to last year's problem. Defend Oregon — the coalition of unions and other groups — picked up ballots in Multnomah County the day before the election, according to the secretary of state's notice of proposed penalty. Of one group of 97 collected, 96 were for the 2018 general election and one was for the May 2018 primary election.

There was a problem, however. Defend Oregon's staff failed to deliver those ballots to the Multnomah County Elections Division before the 8 p.m. deadline. Instead, they were taken to that office on the following day and not counted as a result.

While simple human error may be behind that failure, Secretary of State Dennis Richardson and his staff propose that Defend Oregon be fined \$94,750 for failing to deliver the 96 valid ballots.

It may sound harsh, but even inadvertently denying people the right to vote should have serious consequences.

As the penalty notice put it, "In the Secretary's view, the harm of not having a ballot counted is more severe than any other violation of election law." The failure not only harms individual voters, it is harmful to the election process and damages confidence in the election itself.

Giving Defend Oregon a well-deserved punishment aside, there's another lesson for voters in all this: If you want your vote to count, take responsibility for getting your ballot in on time.

Borrow a stamp, if need be, and mail it early. Or turn it in to local election officials early, rather than waiting until 7:59 p.m. on Election Day.

Tone-deaf approach to harassment training in Salem

Editorial from The (Medford) Mail Tribune:

The Oregon Legislature is off on the wrong foot in its attempt to address a toxic culture of sexual harassment. It's unclear who's at fault, although the federal government shutdown may have played a role. The important thing is to get newly instituted staff training sessions back on track, and quickly, before disillusioned staffers give up and refuse to attend.

Training last fall reportedly went well, but this month, staffers who attended a session conducted by a trainer from the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission walked out, saying the trainer appeared unaware of the culture of harassment that has become a major issue in the Capitol for more than a year.

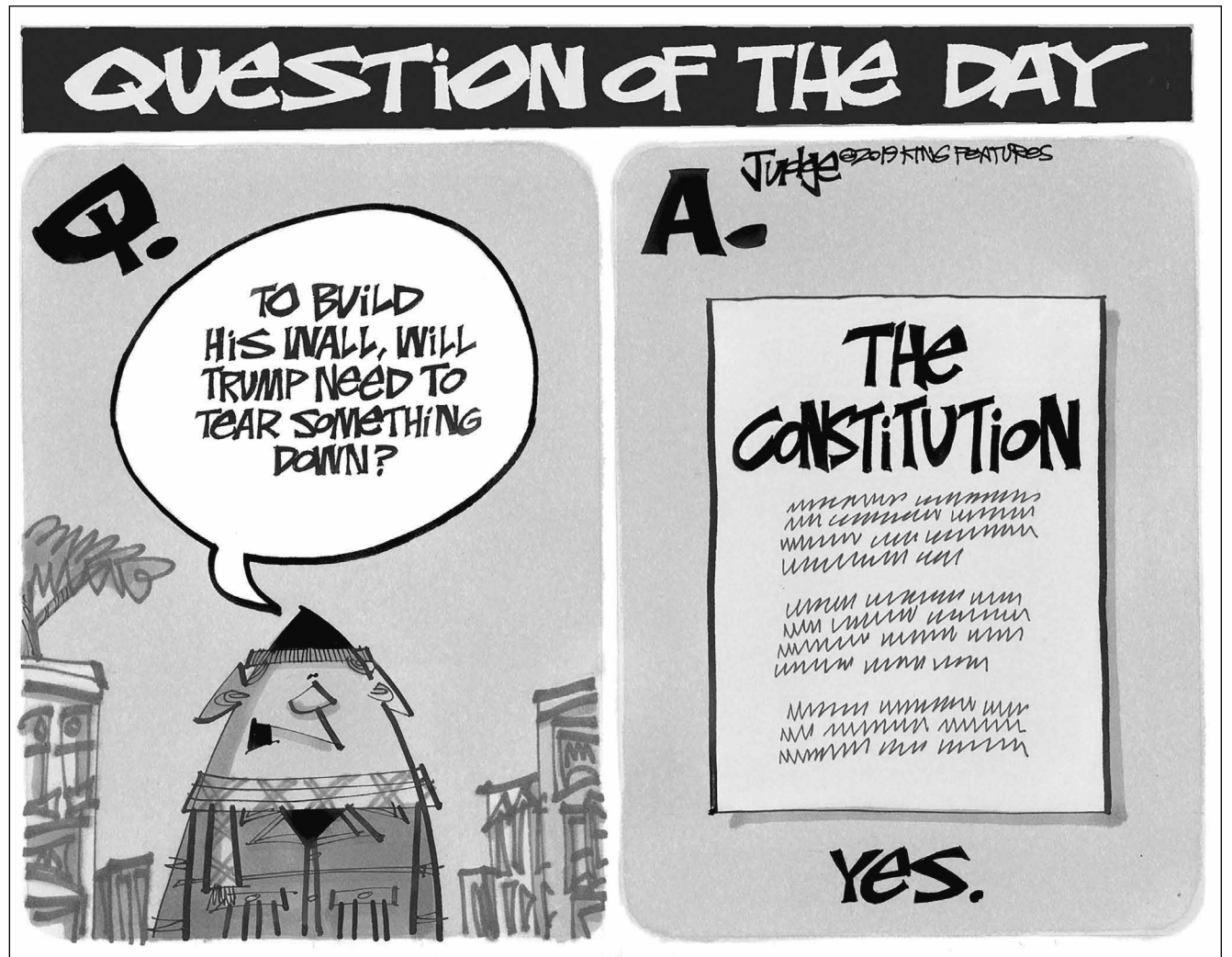
The trainer reportedly joked about those who file harassment complaints, saying, "as you all know, snitches get stitches." At another point, the trainer responded to the topic of inappropriate touching in a dismissive manner, saying "we all know this is bad; we don't need to talk about that."

It was inappropriate touching that ended the career of veteran State Sen. Jeff Kruse, R-Roseburg, after two female lawmakers accused Kruse of inappropriate behavior two years ago, including groping them in meetings. Kruse denied the allegations, but resigned his seat.

Then, last year, the state Bureau of Labor and Industries declared the Legislature a hostile work environment after an investigation. Legislative leaders have appointed a Committee on Culture to address the issue.

But before that committee can make any headway, it must fix what appears to be a tone-deaf approach by at least one trainer provided by the federal EEOC. According to one report, the trainer who conducted last fall's successful session was unavailable because of the federal shutdown. State officials requested a different trainer for this week's session and representatives of the EEOC visited Salem to meet with legislative leaders on Friday.

Regardless of the reason for last week's disastrous training session, there can be no excuse for it. If the EEOC can't provide appropriate training, the state should look elsewhere.



Your views

Harvey's change on county role in managing federal land

I was quite surprised to read in Feb. 15 edition of the Baker City Herald that Baker County Commissioner Bill Harvey now admits, "We don't have supremacy over the (public) land." Surprised, because from the moment he became Commissioner four years ago, that is exactly the misinformation he propagated, including giving a speech in Crook County in March 2016, where he stated, "Coordination status would put Crook County's local government on equal footing with the federal government." (my emphasis.)

Harvey also subscribed to the same nonsense that led the Bundys to take

over the Malheur Wildlife Refuge. That nonsense being that federal land should be "given back" to the states and counties. The same claim was included in Resolution 15-01 drafted by and approved by the Baker County Republican Central Committee on May 7, 2015. In an email dated May 12, 2015, Suzan Ellis Jones, Chair, wrote the following: "The Baker County Republican Party passed a resolution (15-1) to promote the transfer of public lands back to local control. (My emphasis.) Our next step is to take (it) to the Baker County Commissioners and hope they will pass a similar resolution."

Both Harvey and the Baker County Republican Central Committee ignored

the historic record, which clearly states that public domain land in the West was never owned by states and counties where such land exists.

I challenged both Harvey and the local Republican organization to quit complaining and just go ahead and sue the federal government, since that is the only way they can force the feds to "give the land back." At the same time, I asked both Harvey and Jones, if Baker County obtained ownership over present federal land, how would Baker County come up with the money to pay for just one airplane load of fire retardant to fight a wildfire. Never got a response.

Gary Dielman
Baker City

Progress made on public land

On Feb. 12, the U.S. Senate, by an overwhelming 92-8 margin, passed an omnibus package that rolled together more than 100 separate public land and water bills, some of which had languished for more than a decade.

As an academic specializing in U.S. public lands, I consider S.47, the Natural Resources Management Act, to be an epic conservation achievement.

If passed by the House and signed by the president, as expected, it will add 1.3 million acres to the nation's wilderness preservation system, protect 300,000 acres in a new recreation area in Utah's iconic San Rafael Swell, designate 620 miles of wild and scenic rivers, create several new national monuments, expand several national parks and protect buffer areas around several others from mining.

Even more importantly, the bill will permanently reauthorize the invaluable Land and Water Conservation Fund, which expired in September. This fund collects royalties from offshore drilling and uses them to support public land acquisition and recreational infrastructure at the local, state and federal levels. Since its inception in 1965, it has disbursed more than \$18 billion for everything from local soccer fields to national park expansions.

In the current context of environmental deregulation, unbridled resource development on public land, pending oil leases in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the unprecedented stripping of national monument status from two million

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acres in Utah, this bill is a rare piece of good news on the conservation front.

Interestingly, 45 of 53 Republican senators supported this bill, even though most of them had previously voted for a 2015 budget amendment to transfer some of those same federal lands to the states to dispense with as they please. Sen. Steve Daines (R-Montana) celebrated this latest bill's passage even after earning a lifetime score of 2 percent from the League of Conservation Voters; included in that abysmal score is his yes vote on the 2015 transfer.

Why the turn-around?

First, privatizing, transferring or mistreating public lands is really bad politics. It simply has no constituency besides a few libertarian think-tanks, some anti-government militia and the resource extraction industries. The public clearly loves federal lands and members of Congress are slowly learning that they attack them at their peril.

When the onslaught of anti-public lands bills, especially in the House, began around 2011, a sleeping giant seems to have awoken in the building of a broad coalition of environmentalists, sportsmen, recreationists, the outdoor industry, Native Americans, gateway communities whose economies depend on public lands, and pretty much everyone else who loves and enjoys them. There are few issues

in polarized America that enjoy such sturdy bipartisan support.

Secondly, the Democrat's midterm takeover of the House and the ascension of public lands stalwart Raul Grijalva (D-Arizona) as chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources has created more political space for conservation. Perhaps Senate Republicans, never quite as radical or impractical as their House colleagues, are realizing that no major anti-public lands bill will pass anytime soon. They have decided, in effect, that if you can't beat 'em, you might as well join 'em, and bask in the warm glow of an approving public.

Yet as encouraging a moment as this is, the tide has by no means permanently turned in favor of public lands. The Bears Ears National Monument still stands at about 15 percent its former size. Oil exploration "thumper" trucks remain poised on the edge of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. And concerns over biodiversity and endangered species still often get swept aside in the relentless drive to log, mine and drill on as much unprotected federal land as possible.

The need for the public to be vigilant in defense of public lands has not lessened one bit.

Steven Davis is a professor of political science at Edgewood College in Madison, Wisconsin, and the author of "In Defense of Public Lands: The Case Against Privatization and Transfer" (Temple University Press, 2018).

GUEST EDITORIAL

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