

EDITORIAL

Count all the votes

President Donald Trump's slogan is "Make America Great Again."

But a key part of what makes America great is our election system, and the president doesn't seem to have much faith in that system even though it elevated him to the White House 4 years ago.

Perhaps we will know, by the time you read this, whether Trump has won a second term or whether his Democrat rival, Joe Biden, has prevailed.

But as of Wednesday morning it seemed possible that the outcome would still be unknown, with millions of ballots yet to be counted.

This is not surprising.

The coronavirus pandemic resulted in millions of Americans voting by mail who in previous elections cast their ballots at polling places. And in several states, elections officials were not allowed to start counting mail-in ballots early. Some states, unlike Oregon, allow mail-in ballots to be counted so long as they were postmarked by Election Day.

It's a frustrating situation, to be sure.

The more so for Oregonians, who, 20 years after starting vote-by-mail, are accustomed to having relatively rapid results.

But the annoying, even agonizing, wait, is worth it to ensure that, as the hoary old cliché goes, every vote counts.

Trump has vowed to go to the Supreme Court to block the counting of some ballots. He has called for recounts, as is his legal right.

The election might well end up before the nation's highest court — many of us remember 2000, and Bush v. Gore, and Florida's infamous hanging chads.

But all voters who properly cast a ballot and met their state's requirements should have their vote counted. That is not, as Trump described the situation early Wednesday, an attempt to "steal" the election, nor is it "a major fraud on our nation."

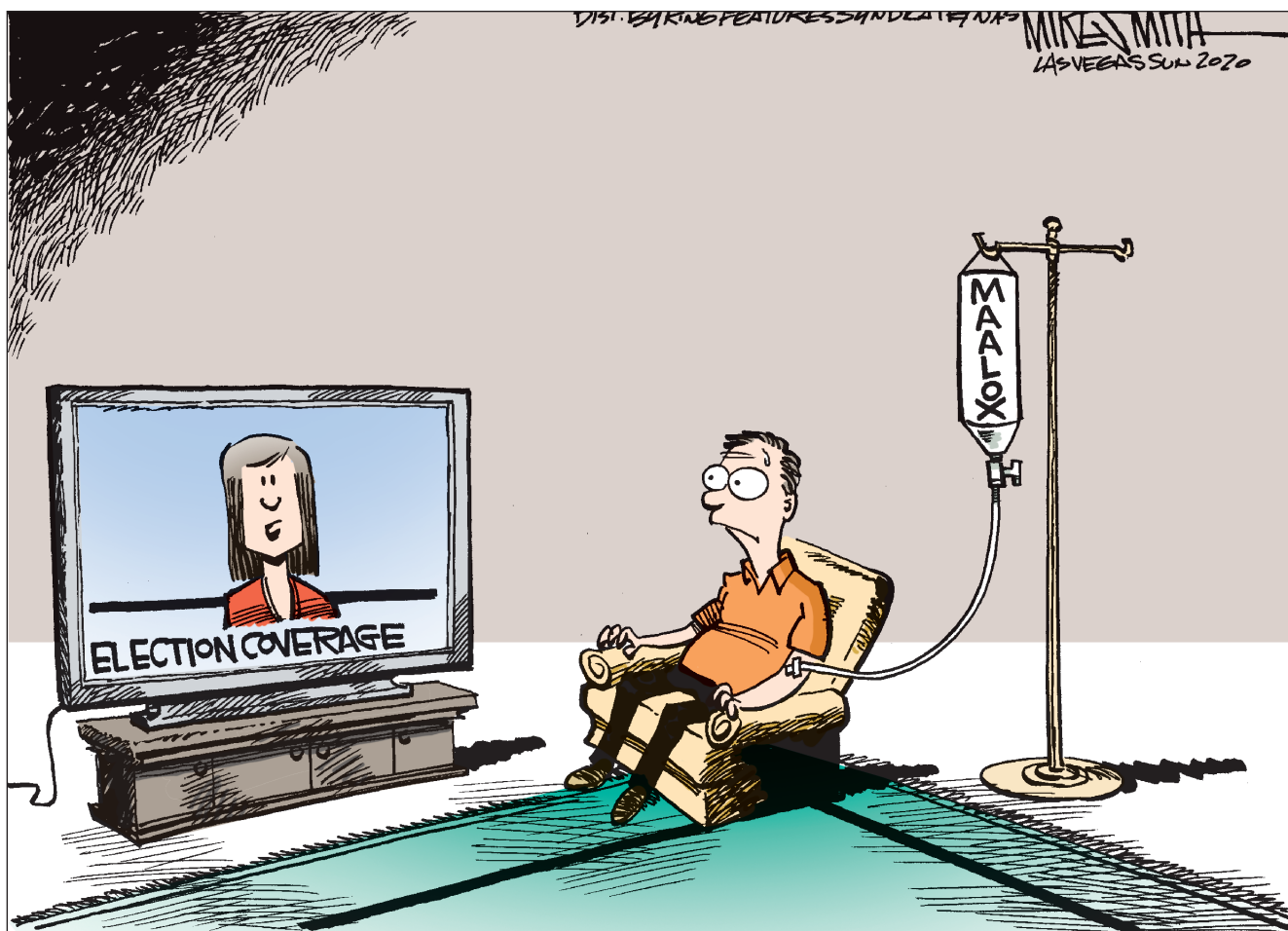
Disenfranchising voters, on the other hand, certainly would constitute a fraud, and a theft.

Trump might win.

It was, if nothing else, an extremely competitive, and close, race.

But the president, no matter how dedicated he is to helping America thrive, can only harm the nation by impugning without convincing evidence the integrity of one of its foundational principles — that citizens, by exercising their right to vote, will determine the direction of their country.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Obsession with political polling obscures the most vital issues

By Jay Ambrose

If you watched TV news during this presidential election campaign, you would sooner or later know everything that matters, namely which of the two candidates is most likely to win, although not for sure. Maybe, on second thought, polling information doesn't matter that much, at least not as much as who should win.

Like so much that now surrounds us, the absolute absorption in polls is next door to insane, not because it isn't important to the tune of daily updates. But dwelling on the matter almost to the point that nothing else matters is absurd. Consider, for instance, that early on in a campaign, you could have polls showing Candidate A is winning 97% to 3%. But it does not tell us the outcome because it has not yet been revealed that Candidate A once robbed a bank. And the day before the election, why care? You're going to get the true answer pretty darn soon, although, in these days of mail-in commotion, it may not be that soon.

In 2016, pollsters told us for months that Hillary Clinton was going to win, thereby going lame on in-depth talk on all kinds of other topics and hurting her feelings when she didn't. I would tune in to PBS NewsHour to catch up on the news and hear she was still winning and then I switched to it on election night,

saw the tears and knew she had lost.

The main thing wrong with this overkill is that it does skip what actually does matter, namely issues along with character and capability. Consider the last debate between President Donald Trump and Joe Biden. We had the issue of fracking oil and natural gas and whether Biden was against it or not and Trump said Biden was against it and it would cost millions of jobs. Biden said he had never said he was against it, although he has as much, and he has made clear he hopes to start a program to eventually get rid of all fossil fuels.

What certain TV news analyses then focused on was what effect all of this would have on Texas and Pennsylvania where oil and gas are major industries with lots of jobs depending on them. Polls show Biden doing unexpectedly well in Texas for a Democrat and also slightly ahead in Pennsylvania, a battleground state that could be huge in who wins. Might his words hurt his standing and what would he do to work his way around it and what might Trump do to take advantage of it? Here are some other questions.

Is fracking a serious environmental hazard? And even if it is, isn't it crucial to our now being energy independent? And hasn't the use of the low-CO2 natural gas it produces done

more than anything to lessen CO2 as it has been substituted for coal? And isn't our energy growth, facilitated to some degree by fracking on federal lands, fundamentally important to our economy and therefore to solving social problems and enhancing our future? Are we really going to try to get rid of all fossil fuels, and wouldn't this be totalitarianism worse than a virus shutdown? Is that crucial to fighting climate change, and if it is, shouldn't we be looking more at nuclear energy as a replacement than unreliable renewable fuels?

And what difference does it make if China does not do anything?

The questions are endless, just as they are in reducing the military budget, enacting a national \$15 minimum wage, packing the Supreme Court and getting rid of the Electoral College, for instance. And yes, these matters are discussed, but not nearly enough and too often simply in the context of what it means to standing in the polls and who is an awful human being. Time is so terribly, terribly wasted in dwelling so much on minor polling shifts that may or may not mean anything and have nothing to do with who would or would not serve the country best.

Jay Ambrose is an op-ed columnist for Tribune News Service. Readers may email him at speaktojay@aol.com.

Next president's top task is to revive bipartisanship

By Doyle McManus

America is a divided nation — and the presidential campaign only made the condition worse.

Partisanship has spiked. Armed militias showed up at campaign rallies. Gun sales soared.

In New York, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and other cities, shop owners nailed plywood over their windows. In a Gallup Poll last month, a record 64% of people said they were "afraid of what will happen" if their favored candidate doesn't win.

"You just don't want to talk to people anymore," Mary Jo Dalrymple, a 56-year-old retiree in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, told me. "You're afraid it will be unpleasant."

This isn't normal — not in decades, perhaps not since the Civil War.

Even with nearly a quarter-million deaths, and 100,000 infections a day, our most durable problem isn't the COVID-19 pandemic; it's a vaccine can solve that. Nor is it the recession; the economy likely will recover once the virus is quelled.

Our biggest challenge is the political polarization that has made the country increasingly ungov-

ernable, no matter who wins.

Polarization has been part of our politics for decades. But under President Donald Trump, it has turned into something worse: delegitimization — the practice of condemning your opponents as un-American, undemocratic and unworthy of respect.

Trump entered politics by questioning President Barack Obama's legitimacy, suggesting falsely that he might not be a U.S. citizen. This year, he charged — again without evidence — that Democratic nominee Joe Biden was mentally and physically infirm and the puppet of "radical socialists" who "hate our country."

On the other side, plenty of Democrats believe Trump is a would-be authoritarian who would gladly destroy the Constitution.

At their first debate, Biden called Trump "one of the most racist presidents we've ever had," overlooking the fact that 12 of the first 18 presidents owned slaves.

Many Democrats and Republicans see the other side not merely as political rivals, but as an existential threat. That creates a dilemma: If you think your opponents don't share a basic commitment to constitutional

government, why would you work with them?

That problem won't disappear once the election is over. Unless one party captures both houses of Congress and the White House, it will stand in the way of the next president accomplishing anything.

In my view, here's what needs to happen.

Step One is making sure the election is seen as legitimate. Partisans on both sides think their opponents are trying to cheat — a sentiment stoked, of course, by Trump's constant declarations that the voting process is "rigged" and his refusal to promise a peaceful transition of power if he loses.

A president who wins by underhanded means will rightly appear illegitimate. He may claim a mandate, but he won't have one.

The runner-up needs to acknowledge reality and give a concession speech — the more graceful, the better. That's how the losing side acknowledges that the winner is legitimate. If the losing candidate refuses to do it, other leaders in his party should do it for him.

Step Two is working to bring the country together, as earlier presidents did after divisive campaigns.

That means a serious attempt to revive bipartisan deal making in Congress, starting where the two parties share similar goals — another economic relief bill to help the country through the pandemic, for example.

It also requires granting your opponents the presumption of legitimacy, no matter how much you dislike their policies.

Biden, who spent 36 years in the Senate, has already said he would try to work with Republicans in Congress if he's elected. Progressive Democrats have sniffed that his nostalgia for a long-ago era of comity is naive.

But Biden knows how the modern Senate operates. He was vice president when Obama tried and failed to win GOP support for an economic stimulus bill in 2009 and for an immigration reform package in 2013.

His talk of bipartisanship may have been a campaign gambit; swing voters like the idea of the two parties working together. It may even be aimed at splitting moderate Republicans from Trump loyalists. Even so, it's worth a try.

It's now almost forgotten, but Trump was elected in 2016 in part because he promised, as a

businessman, to work with both parties.

In his first year in office, he tried to cut deals with Democrats on immigration reform and infrastructure spending. As recently as last week, he was negotiating with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi — at arm's length, to be sure — over a possible stimulus bill.

Even if the results are modest, a bipartisan effort would be an encouraging departure from gridlock. A president who gets things done — as opposed to merely insulting his critics — could see his legitimacy and his popularity grow.

It's been done before: Ronald Reagan did it in the 1980s; Bill Clinton did it in the 1990s; George W. Bush did it in the early 2000s after a disputed election that was decided in the Supreme Court.

If the next president hopes to leave a substantive legacy, he should follow those presidents, work to stem the tide of polarization that has poisoned our politics, and make America's government work again.

Doyle McManus is a columnist for the Los Angeles Times. Readers may send him email at doyle.mcmanus@latimes.com