

## OUR VIEW

## Elections director's firing raises questions

Oregon's vote-by-mail ballot system is a model for other states. That doesn't mean there aren't things that need to be fixed.

It may not be the smoothest way to learn about possible problems, but the departure of Elections Director Steve Trout has helped reveal a few.

Trout says he was fired by text message from Oregon Secretary of State Bev Clarno last week. He had planned on leaving, anyway.

What he had also done is sent a memo just before the election to the Democratic and Republican candidates for secretary of state, Shemia Fagan and Kim Thatcher. He warned about serious issues. He said the elections division had not received money he wanted for projects to replace the state's campaign finance website and do security upgrades.

"Some of our election systems are running on Windows Server 2008," Trout wrote. "End-of-life mainstream support from Microsoft ended back on January 13, 2015, and all support ended on January 14, 2020. Our public facing websites are single threaded through one power supply on the capitol mall and one internet connection. There is no redundancy or resiliency or plan to provide either."

Worrisome, to say the least. When Fagan takes office, she needs to investigate and tell Oregonians if the issues Trout raises are legitimate or not.

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## OTHER VIEWS

## Encouraging news on COVID-19

Editorial from (Minneapolis) Star Tribune:

The welcome news that a COVID-19 vaccine now under development appears to be far more effective than initially hoped is a much-needed burst of good news as the pandemic gathers force across the nation.

But the announcement does not mean it's time to cast aside face masks or other precautions. Nor is it accurate to say that COVID is now "cured," as Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, irresponsibly posted on Twitter.

The positive results shared by Pfizer are encouraging but come with important caveats. One is that the numbers aren't final. While the pharmaceutical giant says its vaccine is more than 90% effective in preventing COVID in those who haven't been infected, these are interim results. The trial remains ongoing.

It's also important to understand that a COVID vaccine, when it becomes available, will prevent the disease in those who haven't been infected. But it's not a treatment for those who are severely ill with it or those who have been infected and potentially face long-term complications.

In addition, Pfizer's data was shared

via a news release instead of in a more rigorously reviewed medical journal. Still, the early data is promising, and the company "plans to ask the Food and Drug Administration for emergency authorization of the two-dose vaccine later this month," The New York Times reported. The company estimated that it will have manufactured enough vaccine by January to immunize 15 million to 20 million people.

In the meantime, Minnesota's Michael Osterholm is warning that the nation is "about to enter COVID hell." Disease metrics here and elsewhere back him up. Daily cases nationwide topped 130,000 this week, a 14-day change of 64%, according to The New York Times' COVID tracker. Deaths rose 18% over the same period.

Osterholm, who heads the University of Minnesota's Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, was named to President-elect Joe Biden's COVID task force earlier this week. The advisory group includes other respected scientists and public health experts. The Trump task force should cooperate with the new Biden group. The nation needs the new team to get a running start. The Trump

administration also shouldn't give up fighting the virus during the transition.

The best defense for individuals remains the low-tech tools of social distancing, face masks, hygiene, limiting family gatherings and getting tested right away if you develop symptoms.

The Pfizer vaccine's early success enhances the value of these commonsense safeguards. This is no longer just about spacing out infections to prevent maxing out hospital capacity. Instead, buckling down until there's a vaccine could stop people from getting infected altogether. That's important when many COVID survivors, even those with mild infections, report troubling symptoms such as fatigue, shortness of breath, joint pain and memory lapses months afterward.

The encouraging news from Pfizer, as well as the promising progress made by other companies developing COVID vaccines, is a reminder of the remarkable work underway by the world's doctors and scientists. They merit our gratitude as the finish line looms. The best way to thank them: taking individual actions, such as wearing a mask and restricting family gatherings, to stop COVID from gaining even more strength.

## A graceful exit? I'm not holding my breath

President Donald Trump has plenty of reasons to be particularly gracious in defeat.

I type those words without being, so far as I know, afflicted by a tumor that is squishing whatever part of my brain controls reasoning and logic.

Nor am I under the influence of any drug stronger than caffeine.

(And even that stimulant's effects are tempered by a generous dollop of eggnog.)

I understand that "gracious" is not among the adjectives often attributed to the president.

Certainly the word poses no threat to, say, "obnoxious" or "arrogant" when it comes to the Trump Top 10.

But even as the president and his acolytes contest the election results that gave the victory to Joe Biden, Trump ought not feel that he is the architect of an epic political failure.

Indeed it's remarkable that Biden's margins in several key states were so slight that Trump's challenges have a veneer — albeit an exceedingly thin one, best measured in microns — of plausibility.

Based on generally accepted political standards, Trump should have lost in a way that could be described as "McGovernian."

(Or "Mondalian" if you prefer an inverted adjective with an extra-terrestrial flavor.)

Trump, unlike those two hapless Democratic candidates, was of course already ensconced in the White House.

Except the traditional advantag-



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es afforded by incumbency hardly seemed a factor in 2020.

Quite the opposite, in fact.

Consider that Trump over the past 9 months has presided over the worst economic calamity to befall this country in more than 80 years.

He has been in office during the most dangerous pandemic to afflict the nation in a century, and he has been widely criticized — sometimes speciously, sometimes with justification — for botching the chance to use his unique position to calm and to lead a troubled nation during dark days.

Finally, the last year of Trump's term has been marked by a level of social and racial strife America hasn't seen since the 1960s.

Even one of those factors might have damaged Trump's presidency and all but ensured a Biden landslide of the sort that Ronald Reagan inflicted on Walter Mondale in 1984, or comparable to Richard Nixon's dominance of George McGovern a dozen years earlier.

But with all three crises happening simultaneously, the most surprising part of the election was not that Biden (almost certainly) won, but rather that Trump, carrying more political baggage than a 747, very nearly did.

Given that, the president, who

seems to delight in defying expectations, could terribly confuse his legions of detractors by saying something along the lines of "Joe Biden has won the Electoral College based on what we know today, but I believe that to ensure Americans have complete confidence in the integrity of our electoral process, I must pursue the legal remedies available to determine, to the extent possible, whether alleged improprieties affected the outcome."

Of course the president has not said anything of the sort.

And I no more expect him to make such a speech than I expect him to give up golf.

Or Twitter.

Trump has instead insisted, with the simplistic and smug certainty that is perhaps his most tiresome trademark, that the election was "stolen."

The president's critics, in response to that claim, have adopted as their mantra the word "unsubstantiated."

But even the most zealous Trump opponent must concede that the 2020 election, due to the pandemic, was unique. Never have so many Americans cast mail ballots.

This doesn't mean widespread voter fraud happened. It certainly doesn't mean that it was inevitable. But the unprecedented nature of the voting lends a patina of plausibility to the allegations.

Ultimately, this is a question which we ought to be able to answer. If we can count almost 150 million ballots then we can

determine, to the satisfaction of any reasonable person, that the results are valid. Trump and his supporters, who are nothing if not loyal, are leveling the extraordinary accusation that voter fraud changed the outcome of a presidential election. If they can't show us indisputable proof, then their charge will turn out to be not merely unfounded, but reckless.

Biden, meanwhile, vows that he will strive to unify a divided America.

You needn't be a pessimist to wonder whether that's possible.

But if Biden is to succeed even partially at this seemingly Sisyphean task, then he must never forget that about 72 million of the people who likely will become his constituents in January voted for Trump.

And however tempting it might be to dismiss that sizable group as beneath contempt, as some of the more strident left-wing zealots do, I hope Biden will be more circumspect.

The more vociferous anti-Trumpers, it seems to me, conflate every vote for the president into an enthusiastic endorsement of the man's abrasive personality.

This is silly.

As silly as contending that each of the 77 million or so Americans who voted for Biden did so solely because they were overwhelmed by his charisma and keen vision for a great American revival, and not at all influenced by their disdain for Trump.

Only those two had a legitimate chance to win the election. And the

vast majority of voters, quite naturally, want to support a candidate who can win.

I hope Biden understands that some Trump voters, and possibly a significant percentage of them, find Trump the man at times reprehensible and consider his Twitter account a torrent of juvenile putdowns. Yet they support his administration's pursuit of tax cuts and a reasonable curbing of government regulations because those approaches best reflect their personal preferences.

In any case the election is no mandate for Biden to pursue a drastic recasting of this country.

The mistake that I think many people have made since Trump became a candidate in 2015 is to treat his tweets as if they matter as much as, if not more than, his policies.

It seems to me that many of Trump's most ardent opponents have been seduced by his cult of personality as thoroughly as his bootlickers have been.

I'm often appalled by the man's apparent lack of anything resembling tact. But I don't take this personally. He's certainly not speaking (or tweeting) to me.

To fret obsessively about his sophomoric nicknames for his foes, as though these slurs affect our lives, and our nation, and his actions as the head of the executive branch, is to give him what all bullies crave, which is attention.

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