

Oregon, where voting is easy

Unlike much of the U.S., last month's mid-term election was ho-hum in Oregon — as in, few election snafus. The state Elections Division certified Oregon's results last week, while races in some states remained undecided amid recounts, court challenges and allegations of fraud. From California to North Carolina, questions have been raised about the security of absentee voting by mail.

In Oregon, 1,914,923 voters cast ballots — a record for a mid-term election. Voting violations are rare, although a union-backed group, Our Oregon, did deliver 97 ballots to the Multnomah County elections office a day after the election deadline. The state Elections Division is investigating.

The ballots were collected from voters but not turned in by Defend Oregon, a political action committee affiliated with Our Oregon. Groups collect ballots to ensure they are cast, but the practice — called ballot harvesting — has raised concerns in some states for fear that partisan groups might have discarded ballots, because of the voters' demographics, or altered unsealed ballots.

Such concerns provide one more reason why Oregon should make its ballots postage-paid so more voters mail them in, as Gov. Kate Brown proposed in her 2019-21 state budget recommendation.

The reality is that the term "vote-by-mail" is inaccurate. Ballots are delivered to voters by mail but not necessarily returned that way. A 2016 survey found the majority of voters in Oregon, California and Washington took their ballots to a county elections office or official drop-site.

Oregon led the nation in launching all-mail voting, and this year gained

the distinction of being the No. 1 state for ease of voting. Political scientists from Northern Illinois University, Jacksonville University and China's Wuhan University created a "Cost of Voting Index" to analyze each state's election laws.

Following Oregon at No. 1 were Colorado, California, North Dakota and Iowa. At the bottom: Mississippi, Virginia, Tennessee, Indiana and Texas.

Oregon combines vote-by-mail with automatic voter registration when an Oregon resident and U.S. citizen visits the DMV to apply for, renew or replace a state driver license, permit or identification card. Brown wants to expand that automatic registration to include citizen interactions at other state agencies.

By the way, 16- and 17-year-olds can register but not vote until age 18.

However, Oregon lags in other ways. A third of U.S. states allow voter registration up through Election Day. North Dakota doesn't even require registration. Yet Oregon cuts off registration 20 days before an election, having ended same-day registration in the 1980s because followers of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh recruited homeless individuals around the U.S. to come to Wasco County and vote for the sect's local candidates.

Vote-by-mail in Oregon has been studied extensively. There is little evidence of fraud, although 48 individuals were suspected of voting twice in the 2016 presidential election, and six ballots were submitted from dead persons.

Such allegations are unsettling in a state that prides itself on clean elections. Yet they are tiny compared with the complaints of election fraud and vote suppression roiling other states.



Accidents, fires and mismatched socks

By BRIANNA WALKER
For the Blue Mountain Eagle

"And my ... my ... ?" the lady quietly stammered from the hotel room threshold. My family, pulling our luggage, ducked as we walked down the sidewalk between the lady in the doorway and the man stepping out of his car. "... my house?" she finally asked.

The man silently, solemnly shook his head. The lady covered her mouth and let out an anguished guttural sound as she stumbled back into the hotel room.

Our luggage seemed loud and obnoxious as it bumped and clattered across the concrete cobblestones. We kept our heads down and tried to be as unobtrusive as possible as we made our way to our own room. It was not hard to miss that most of the cars in the parking lot had masks on the dashboards. Making a second trip to our vehicle for miscellaneous items, my husband ran into a man who was walking his two dogs. He had lost three homes in the fire: his own, his daughter's and a rental. Later in the pool, a lady told us that her grandmother's house was leveled. The mood of the hotel was not one of boisterous vacationers and busy businessmen. Instead, it was as solemn as the red smoke horizon.

Driving down the highway, charred ground burned all the way to the asphalt. Smoke curled lazily up from blackened fence posts as we continued south through the smoky city of Chico. Police blocked exits off all the roads heading in the direction of the active fire.

I glanced toward the red sky. This was our annual trip south to pick up persimmons, citrus and nuts. As it is close to our anniversary, we usually try to combine it with a fun activity or two — it's a fun trip that the whole family looks forward to. But this year was different — right from the beginning.



We left in a rush, unable to find matching socks, and forgetting our coats entirely. No time to go back, we'd just make do. Then out in the middle of central Oregon — about the time that radio signals are lost and cell phone service is sketchy at best — there was a little smell. The most terrible little smell — that you ever did smell. (OK, I've been singing too many kid songs lately.) Really, it was a bad smell.

"Oh, Bug," I sighed, twisting around to see in the back seat. "Why didn't you tell us you needed to stop?"

"I clean, Mommy," he said pinching his nose as he looked at me. My nose twitched, and I tried to keep my irritation in check. An accident is one thing, but a blatant lie? Ugh. I sat forward in my chair again and looked at my husband, "I guess we'll have to pull over."

We went around corner after corner with not a pullout in sight. The traffic was traveling on at a pretty decent clip, and my husband felt the shoulder was too narrow to pull off safely — especially after having just attended the funeral of his friend who was hit while changing a tire. He finally spotted a wide area and stopped.

I got the wipes while my husband laid down our son on a blanket on the tailgate. The smell said this was going to be a disaster. I was surprised to see nothing had escaped his jeans. I took off his boots and carefully pulled off his pants. They were clean! He was clean! Just like he had said. My husband and I were both stunned. To say the smell was pervasively rank wouldn't have done a good enough job of describing how horrible it had been.

We redressed our toddler and were quickly back out on the road,

and had it not been for what happened next, we probably would never have remembered the incident.

As we rounded the next a corner, dust billowed across the road, and there were cars on the shoulder of the road and some in the middle. An oncoming semi-truck swerved and a black dog darted through the traffic.

"What's going on?" I wondered aloud.

"I think it's rubberneckers for the accident," my husband said, motioning to the car upside down on the side of the road. The car's tires were still spinning and a smoke billowed from the overturned engine. It took a second before we recognized the vehicle we'd been following before we pulled off for the mysterious smell. Suddenly an arm flung out of the window. We pulled over, and my husband and another couple helped the woman out of the wreck. She was dazed but alive, crying incoherently for her two dogs — we looked 'til dark, but unfortunately, we only found one.

Back on the road, neither of us felt talkative — both of us realizing that had we not stopped to change "the most terrible little smell" that it would have been very difficult to avoid being in that accident. While telling the story to my cousin the next day, she laughed, "I guess angels really know how to let one out!"

A very bad accident and a very bad fire — just on the cursory edge of each. Not enough to feel the pain that the victims felt, but touched enough by it that it made me feel an enormous gratitude for my life, my family and even our stinky guardian angels!

Be thankful for today. My socks may not match — but my feet are warm.

Brianna Walker occasionally writes about the Farmer's Fate for the Blue Mountain Eagle.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter: Attend objection meetings

To the Editor:

I wanted to say how much I appreciated everyone that attended first set of meetings on the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision. It was great to see everyone who had traveled from around the West to have their objections heard or to support those who were speaking out about the plan.

I was impressed with the care each of you took to present your objections to Mr. French and his team, but even more, I was awe struck at the control each of you

showed in a matter that is very dear to each of our hearts and that impacts our ability to sustain our families in northeastern Oregon. While open access to our mountains seems to be such a simple concept when it comes to subsistence use, it eludes those that make decisions who have never had to worry about heating their homes with firewood or had to extract food that supplements our families through the winter.

While we saw a solid turnout of objectors in the meetings from Nov. 27 to Dec. 1, I fear a great deal of those who objected missed out on these first meetings and did not have their voices heard. The

team from D.C. stated we would hear back from them sometime at the end of January, and we should expect additional meetings sometime in March to see what the next steps would be.

If the meetings are held in March it will be paramount that every objector attend the meetings and participate in the process. I ask each of you that know you are an objector to follow Forest Access For All on Facebook to get current information on the process and how to participate.

Again, I appreciate each of you that participated.

John D. George
Bates

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WHERE TO WRITE

GRANT COUNTY
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• **Canyon City** — P.O. Box 276, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-575-0509. Fax: 541-575-0515. Email: tocc1862@centurylink.net.
• **Dayville** — P.O. Box 321, Dayville 97825. Phone: 541-987-2188. Fax: 541-987-2187. Email: dville@ortelco.net
• **John Day** — 450 E. Main St, John Day, 97845. Phone: 541-575-0028. Fax: 541-575-1721. Email: cityjd@centurytel.net.



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Publisher.....Chris Rush, crush@eomediagroup.com
Editor & General Manager.....Sean Hart, editor@bmeagle.com
Reporter.....Richard Hanners, rick@bmeagle.com
Community News.....Angel Carpenter, angel@bmeagle.com
Sports.....Angel Carpenter, angel@bmeagle.com
Marketing Rep.....Kim Kell, ads@bmeagle.com
Administrative Assistant.....Makenna Adair, office@bmeagle.com
Office Assistant.....Alexandra Hand, office@bmeagle.com

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