

America should imitate Oregon on voting by mail

Norma Paulus would be proud. And she would be amazed. As secretary of state from 1977 until 1985, Paulus was the prime mover of Oregon's voting by mail. Other states have been slow to follow Oregon's lead. But — in the way that sudden events provoke unexpected change — the coronavirus makes voting by mail a timely solution.

Oregon's U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden and U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota have authored legislation to make the mail ballot more prevalent.

For Wyden, this has been a long slog. He first introduced this legislation in 2002.

"I've never had the interest that we have now," he said during a Monday interview.

"During the most recent slate of presidential primary elections, three states opted to postpone voting because of the coronavirus."

In this climate, Wyden argues that the pandemic offers a stark choice. "Either people are not going to be able to vote or they vote by mail. If those are the two choices for America this fall, that is not a close call."

Like the bottle bill, public beaches and statewide land use planning, voting by mail is one of Oregon's emblematic, pioneering achievements. Initially, it was a Republican proposal, opposed by labor unions that influenced the Democratic party. Then it became a Democratic party cause, led by Secretary of State Phil Keisling, who served in the 1990s.

Under Paulus, counties were allowed to use the mail ballot for nonprimary or non-general elections. When counties took advantage of the new mode of voting, turnout increased by factors of three and five, Keisling said.

In 1995, the Oregon Legislature enacted Keisling's bill to allow voting by mail, but Gov. John Kitzhaber vetoed it.

Months later, a surprise allowed Keisling to make history. When Bob Packwood resigned from the U.S. Senate in 1995, county clerks across Oregon urged Keisling to conduct the sudden, special Senate election by mail ballot. He could do that, because existing statute prohibited mail ballots only in the primary and gen-

eral elections.

The special primary in 1995 and the general election in early 1996 became the first federal elections in America to be conducted by mail. Turnout was high — 58% in the special primary and 66% in the general. Wyden became Oregon's new U.S. senator.

In 1998, Oregon voters by a margin of 2-to-1 approved a ballot measure mandating voting by mail in all Oregon elections.

Keisling has continued his advocacy within the National Vote At Home Institute, of which he is founder and a board member. His 2016 article in the Washington Monthly ("Vote From Home, Save Your Country") is an extensive history of the national discussion of mail balloting.

In the most recent development, Wyden's biggest opponent is the voting machine lobby. Of digital voting, the Oregon Democrat says: "A voting machine with remote access software is the equivalent of putting an American ballot box in the Kremlin." He disparages the voting machine lobby, saying: "They lied to me, to the New York Times. They stonewalled Congress."

Wyden measures his progress by how many Republican senators who now say they are thinking about his proposal.

The emergency package in Congress in response to the coronavirus includes \$400 million to help states with elections, but Wyden and Klobuchar believe more help is needed.

"In times of crisis, the American people cannot be forced to choose between their health and exercising their right to vote," the senators said in a statement. "While this funding is a step in the right direction, we must enact election reforms across the country as well as secure more resources to guarantee safe and secure elections. We will continue to fight to pass the Natural Disaster and Emergency Ballot Act of 2020 to ensure every eligible American can safely and lawfully cast their ballot."

An adverse moment in history reinforces the case that voting by mail makes abundant sense.

It's time for America to imitate Oregon.



GUEST COMMENT

Health department reports 21 COVID-19 tests administered in Grant County

Grant County Health Department

Greetings, residents of Grant County.

Beginning today and occurring daily for the immediate future, the Grant County Health Department will provide information to county residents on the total number of COVID-19 tests administered, total number of negative tests, total positive tests and total tests pending.

Up until three weeks ago, the Oregon State Public Health Laboratory was the only lab processing COVID-19 tests in Oregon. The data that was reported by the Oregon Health Authority came from the OSPHL. At that time, the data was an accurate reflection of the testing that was occurring in all counties in Oregon.

In the last several weeks private labs have begun testing for COVID-19. That is good news. All labs immediately report the results of the tests to the health care provider that ordered the test, and they report positives to the county health department. However, there is a significant delay in private labs reporting negative results to OHA. Given this, the data that is currently appearing on the OHA website is not an accurate reflection of testing that is occurring in Grant County.

At the time of writing this article, the OHA website shows that five tests have been administered in Grant County, with one positive result and four negative results.

To address the discrepancy, the health department will report the most up to date testing completed in Grant County. This information from Blue Mountain Hospital District, Grant County Public Health Department and primary care will be reported daily to the media. Following is the information for March 30, 2020. Note: This information may

not include negative or pending test results completed out of county on Grant County residents.

Total COVID-19 tests administered in Grant County: 21

Total Positive: 1

Total Negative: 16

Total Pending: 4

As previously indicated, it is important to note that this information will not match information provided on OHA's website. However, we feel it is important to provide Grant County residents with the most accurate information possible.

Health care providers are doing their best to be very strategic with testing for multiple reasons.

There is a short supply of test kits available at this time.

We are attempting to minimize traffic within the hospital, especially for those who only have mild or no symptoms to help prevent potential additional exposures within the hospital.

There is a critical shortage of Personal Protective Equipment, and as the outbreak develops, this will continue to decrease the supplies on hand. Each test administered requires the use of full PPE, and if testing is completed on everyone with mild symptoms, we are further depleting our supply of PPE with each test, when in fact these people are advised to stay home and self-isolate until 72 hours after symptoms have resolved.

Ideally, health care providers would love to have enough testing capability and PPE supplies to test everyone that would like to be tested. Unfortunately this is not an option at this point.

We are encouraging people to stay home and to self-isolate if they are sick until 72 hours after symptoms have resolved. If symptoms such as difficulty breathing, confusion or chest palpitation occur and medical care is needed, people are

encouraged to call their primary care provider, the hospital or 911. This will allow the hospital to prepare for the arrival of a potential COVID-19 case. The provider will evaluate the person and then will decide if testing should be completed.

Grant County health officials continue to urge Grant County to take steps to protect those who are most vulnerable to complications from COVID-19.

Those considered "high risk" include adults 60 and older, or anyone with a serious health condition, including lung or heart problems, kidney disease or diabetes, or anyone who has a suppressed immune system.

People vulnerable to complications should follow OHA and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations to stay home as much as possible and avoid gatherings.

Every resident should take these basic steps to protect those most at risk:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.
- Stay home if you feel ill.

The COVID-19 virus spreads like the flu, when someone who is sick coughs or sneezes close to another person (close means approximate six feet).

After someone contracts COVID-19, illness usually develops within 14 days. Symptoms mirror those of the flu, including fever, cough, runny nose, headache, sore throat and general feelings of illness.

We would urge those who present with these symptoms to call 211, their primary care provider or the Grant County Health Department at 541-575-0429.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Ben Combs deserved league recognition

To the Editor:

Regarding Ukiah/Long Creek basketball: Why wasn't Ben Combs given some recognition in the High Desert League for being a really good player? I watched most of the games. Ben gave 100% and accomplished a lot (rebounds, points, steals). He was a team player. He played the whole game, every game, until he broke his right hand and still played left handed.

We had people from the games telling us they loved watching Ben play and people from the opposing team complementing Ben on being such a good player.

Sandy Thompson
Dale

Neighborhood watch reminiscent of special deputies

To the Editor:

I read with some amusement in the March 26 edition of the paper when Deputy Dobler espoused the "broken window" theory of policing. This from the same agency who told me two years ago that they were not going to investigate a witnessed hit and run on my wife's vehicle because we had auto insurance to cover the damage! It just so happens that the suspect of the witnessed event was one of Palmer's special deputies. Maybe Deputy Dobler should talk with his boss before releasing more "special deputies" on the public. It seems a little suspect that Sheriff Palmer begins naming "special deputies" before another upcoming election.

Steve Smartt
John Day

Appreciation for community spirit

To the Editor:

Benny Santos is the franchise owner of the John Day Dairy Queen.

Three weeks ago on Wednesday, March 11, the John Day Dairy Queen offered meals at half off to those who came inside to eat.

What most people don't know is that this half-off day was not a DQ corporate event.

The half of your meal that you didn't pay for came out of Mr. Santos' pocket.

He told us that this was his way of giving back to this community.

We appreciate his community spirit.

Tom and Sandra Sutton
John Day



"SO I WENT ON SPRING BREAK ANYWAY AND MET A NEW GUY."

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