

Mistakes erode the public's trust level

Gov. Kate Brown announced on March 18 that the state had a deal with a private laboratory to do 20,000 COVID-19 tests. In early days of the state's pandemic response, it was a very reassuring declaration that the state could tap into private testing to reveal the scope of the virus.

"It's critical for us to increase our capacity so that we can fully assess the spread of COVID-19 in Oregon," Brown said.

But the deal turns out to be about half true. The state is only going to get about half the tests. No contract had been signed when the announcement was made. And the state does not plan to put the tests into immediate use to test more Oregonians.

We don't believe Brown intentionally misled anyone. Nik Blosser, the governor's chief of staff, told The Oregonian it was his fault and apologized for the misinformation provided to the governor to announce.

The state was working on a deal. He explained that he was confused about how testing works and rushed to release information without confirming it.

The state actually did not sign the contract with the provider, Quest Diagnostics, until two weeks after Brown's announcement. It is for up to \$690,000 at \$69 a test. And the state is not planning to use them right now. It will hold on to them and use them later — perhaps when some social distancing requirements are lifted and there is a new surge.

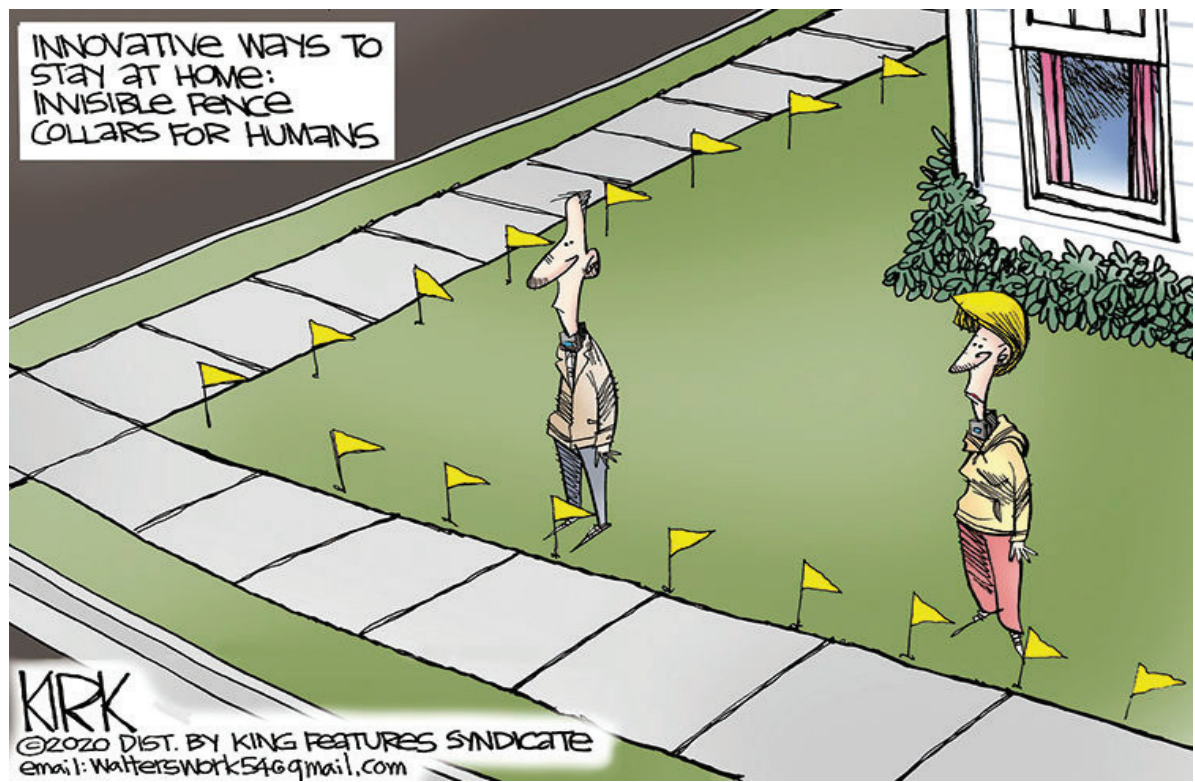
How is it that we know Brown's announcement was wrong?

We know because journalists at The Oregonian asked questions and used Oregon's public records law to hold government accountable. Reporters looked for a copy of the contract in a state database.

It wasn't there. They asked for a copy of the contract.

It wasn't provided until a week later. And it turned out the deal was smaller than had been announced — 10,000 tests, not 20,000 — and had not even been signed until April 1.

In a crisis or under tight deadlines, people do sometimes not act carefully. It's human nature. But it's vital that Oregonians can trust what Brown says the state is doing about COVID-19. She can't allow the public's faith in the government's response to erode.



GUEST COMMENT

Primary election will go on as scheduled

Despite challenges brought by the coronavirus pandemic, Oregon's May 19 Primary Election will go on as scheduled. Our proven vote by mail system means we don't have to be concerned with social distancing issues at polling places that so many other states are struggling with. For the first time in Oregon, ballots can be returned without a stamp since the state has provided prepaid return postage. Ballots can still be delivered to an official drop box if you prefer.

Election processes have been underway for weeks now, and ballots and the voters' pamphlet are at the printer being prepared to be mailed out. Ballots for our military and overseas voters have already been mailed. The voters' pamphlet containing voting information, candidate statements and measure arguments, should arrive at every residential address in Oregon April 22-24. It also contains a voter registration form inside for anyone who is not yet registered. Ballots will start being mailed to registered voters on April 29.

The May 19 election is a primary election. Primaries serve two main purposes. The first is for all voters to



Steve Trout

be able to cast ballots for candidates for nonpartisan offices like judges and some county and other local offices. The second is for the voters registered with a political party to select their nominees for partisan office like U.S. president, Oregon secretary of state, treasurer and attorney general and legislators at both the state and national level.

Those 40-plus percent of Oregonians registered as not affiliated with a political party, or registered with a minor party (Constitution, Independent, Libertarian, Pacific Green, Progressive, Working Families), will receive a ballot that includes only nonpartisan offices. In the May Primary, only registered Republicans will be able to vote to choose their nominees for partisan offices, and only registered Democrats will be able to vote to choose their nominees for partisan offices. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that political parties get to decide who votes in their primaries so those 1.2 million of you registered as not affiliated with a political party or reg-

istered with a minor party will not have candidates for president or any partisan office on your May primary ballot. This is not a mistake. You will have them on your Nov. 3 ballot.

If you desire to register to vote, update your registration or change your political party, the deadline is April 28, but do it as soon as possible. As always, go to your trusted source of election information at oregonvotes.gov. Oregon is one of the easiest places to register and vote. At the beginning of April there were 2,854,691 Oregonians registered to vote. That means 91% of those that are eligible to vote are registered to vote. That compares to 10 years ago where we had 2,033,951 registered voters and 71% of those eligible to vote were registered to vote.

We encourage all Oregonians to be registered to vote with your most current information, to study the voters' pamphlet and to participate in our elections this year. The time to engage is now! Visit oregonvotes.gov/myvote to check your registration and update it if necessary.

Steve Trout is the director of the Oregon Elections Division of the Secretary of State.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Don't bid on Hammond allotments

To the Editor:
Our ranchers and grazing allotment owners in Southeastern Oregon are of the highest caliber of working people. They understand fully what it takes to run a business when 73% of the area's resources needed to run that business are manipulated by the U.S. government. Further, ranchers are honest, compassionate, environmentally astute, ethical people who depend on one another to help each other when the need arises. With this being said, I am making the following request to those ranchers, grazing allotment owners and any other entities who have been asked to bid on the Hammond Ranch allotments.

Request: I am hereby asking all these ranchers and allotment owners, who were invited to bid on the Hammond allotments, to decline to do so, and if the process leads them to be chosen to get these allotments, I would ask them to refuse the contract.

I make this request not just for the Hammonds but for all the allotment owners everywhere in Oregon and the West!

I have asked the BLM via a FOIA request for the list of all entities who were asked to bid on the allotments. The local BLM people were helpful, but I doubt I will receive the FOIA information before the filing due date of the 14th of April. I think it is very telling that even the application allotment maps are referred to as "Hammond FFR #06100" etc. Even the BLM knows these are Hammonds' allotments and are "real property"!

Now our community needs to come together and make this request to decline to participate to all the ranchers, and any others we know, who may have been invited to bid.

I have discussed the issue and this approach with Dwight Hammond, and he neither supported nor rejected this request forward. Pray that they win the appeal to the revocation of their allotments! We must do what we, as a community, can in the interim!

If they can do this injustice to the Hammonds, they can do it to any other allotment owner. We need to stand together as a community against tyranny and injustice!

Tim K. Smith
Hines

Non-affiliated voters should choose party

To the Editor:
What is an "NAV" in the state of Oregon? An "NAV" is a non-affiliated voter.

Do the Non-affiliated voters realize the impact their vote has on the Oregon election — or better yet, does not have on an Oregon election?

It may feel to a voter like they're proclaiming their independence by not affiliating with a political party. But that "independence" comes at a price to our democracy, and particularly in Oregon, a closed primary state. May is our Primary election. In 90% of the races in Oregon, an NAV's vote is meaningless; how sad is that? Do NAV's have this realization?

Consider our state of Oregon election system:

- First past the post voting guarantees that only two "sides" emerge as viable candidates

- Closed primaries mean only major party voters participate, which means that the most partisan Democrats and Republicans select the only two "viable" candidates. Especially as the parties shrink to a smaller and smaller group of the most partisan and assured.

- And not least, gerrymandering. Our Oregon state election laws are structured so the Republican May nominee wins in red districts. The Democrats May nominee wins in blue districts. In fact, in some districts as few as 8% of the voters effectively elect their state representatives because of safe gerrymandered districts and the shrinking size of the dominant party.

The result? Non-affiliated voters are totally meaningless in 90% of the districts in a state with closed primaries and gerrymandered districts.

Perhaps NAV's in the County of Grant should take a real hard look at their choice. Perhaps NAV's in the County of Grant don't realize how devalued their vote becomes. Perhaps NAV's in the County of Grant who favor or want change should entertain changing their registration online at the secretary of state's website: <http://sos.oregon.gov/elections>, under "Voting and Elections."

Frances Preston, chair
Grant County Oregon Republican Central Committee

A Chinese import courtesy of corporate America

To the Editor:
Coronavirus, another import to America from China, brought to you courtesy of corporate America.

Fred Fitzgerald
Monument



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- **Oregon Legislature** — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180. Website: leg.state.or.us (includes Oregon Constitution and Oregon Revised Statutes).
- **Oregon Legislative Information** — (For updates on bills, services, capitol or messages for legislators) — 800-332-2313.
- **Sen. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario** — 900 Court St. NE, S-301, Salem 97301. Phone: 503-986-1730. Website: oregonlegislature.gov/Bentz. Email: Sen.CliffBentz@oregonlegislature.gov.
- **Rep. Lynn Findley, R-Vale** — 900 Court St. NE, H-475, Salem 97301. Phone: 503-986-1460. Website: oregonlegislature.gov/findley. Email: Rep.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov.
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