

Redistricting and politics

Oregonians trust politicians to make decisions about what taxes are collected, how taxes are spent and policies that shape lives. But should politicians be trusted with setting up voting districts?

A proposed ballot measure aims to take politicians out of political redistricting. The measure would create a citizen commission to draw the lines. Would it be more fair? That's unclear.

The new census will mean Oregon's congressional and legislative districts will be redrawn. In Oregon, the districts are now redrawn by legislators. That could be putting the fox in charge of the henhouse — at least that's what the groups supporting a citizen commission argue. The measure is backed by the League of Women Voters of Oregon, Oregon Common Cause, the Independent Party and The Taxpayer Association of Oregon.

It would work like this: It creates an independent, multipartisan commission of 12 Oregonians. They would hold public meetings across the state and draw up the boundaries in an open process. The goal is for it to be done fairly, respecting communities and less manipulated by partisanship or other politics.

The proposal takes substantial steps to keep politicians out of it. People would apply for the commission spots. Basically, paid politicians couldn't be chosen. People who have recently run for such offices couldn't be chosen. Neither could their staff. Political consultants are barred. An individual who has given more than \$2,700 a year to any single candidate couldn't be chosen. There are also requirements to limit the members from the two largest political parties and include nonaffiliated voters. From the pool of applicants, candidates for the commission would be winnowed by administrative law judges and would eventually be chosen by lot. The governor could remove someone from the commission, but only with a two-thirds majority vote of the Senate.

Gerrymandering began before it was called gerrymandering, before the country's independence. It's the

idea of drawing a voting district so it will get a certain kind of candidate elected.

The name was immortalized in a political cartoon satirizing a law signed by Massachusetts Gov. Elbridge Gerry in 1812. The law redrew state Senate districts to ensure Gerry's party — Thomas Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans — would be strong and John Adams and Alexander Hamilton's Federalists would be weak. It worked. One of the districts looked a bit like a salamander. Gerrymander was born.

The U.S. Supreme Court has been reluctant to decide when partisanship goes too far in gerrymandering. It would require two things difficult for the courts: defining what is fair and divining the future. What's a clear test for fairness? There are many different ways to measure what's fair. Fair to whom? Fair to what? As Chief Justice John Roberts wrote, choosing one "poses basic questions that are political, not legal." The courts would also have to look at a district and somehow know that in the future the outcomes it creates would turn out to be unfair — by some definition. It's additionally unclear that the founders intended judges to decide such things.

These days, leaning on big data, political consultants have more tools than ever to draw up districts to get an outcome they want. Does Oregon need to change? Oregonians could do nothing. If legislators are making the redistricting decisions, they can be held accountable by voters, though it would be mostly after the districts are drawn.

An independent redistricting commission creates a way to try to minimize the influence of some politicians on the process. Commissioners will still have to make choices about defining what is fair. They will still have to guess if sticking the lines in one place will produce more "fair" outcomes in the future. We don't know if the commission would be more fair. It might. It would, however, get more Oregonians involved in making important decisions about how they are governed.

SOON THE LAST FOOTPRINTS OF THE NEARLY 175,000 TROOPS THAT CHARGED THE BEACHES AND CLIFFS OF NORMANDY WILL BE ERASED BY TIME AND TIDE, BUT THE MARK MADE BY THEIR HEROIC ACTIONS ARE INDELIBLY INGRAINED IN OUR MEMORY FOR ETERNITY.



GUEST COMMENT

National Military Appreciation Month is a time to honor America's many heroes

May is National Military Appreciation Month, since 1999 an annual opportunity for Americans to honor veterans and active-duty members of our military services. But this month-long observance takes on special meaning in 2020, a year so disrupted by COVID-19, because so many men and women on the front lines of this pandemic are also active-duty military or veterans now protecting us on a very different kind of battlefield.

Perhaps thousands now serving their nation so heroically as medical caregivers and first responders honed their skills in military service, sometimes under the stress of combat conditions. Today they are gallantly applying their compassion and skills in a no-less stressful battle against COVID-19.

Recent months have also seen active-duty military called to assist in the pandemic, for example the physicians and nurses on military hospital ships in New York City and Los Angeles harbors, and the soldiers who set up temporary hospitals in stadiums, convention halls and New York's Central Park. In my own state of Ohio, National Guard troops helped communities deliver food, while others with medical backgrounds stepped in to care for the sick in an overwhelmed federal prison. Other examples abound.

As we use National Military Appreciation Month to salute these heroes — and indeed all the men and women serving our country today and veterans who served in years past — we must not forget thousands of veterans who continue to struggle with service-related injuries, including traumatic brain injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which is a form of brain injury.



Chrissanne Gordon, MD

In fact, nearly 450,000 combat veterans have returned from their tours of duty in either Iraq or Afghanistan with TBI sustained from an improvised explosive device blast, the explosion of a rocket-propelled grenade or the concussive force of heavy artillery. All are struggling with a potentially devastating, yet outwardly invisible consequence of service to our nation.

Because these veterans had great difficulty receiving medical assistance for these wounds of war, I founded the Resurrecting Lives Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to seeing that combat veterans with TBI receive expert medical care, rehabilitation and community support services they need for a successful return to civilian life. Our goal, put another way, is to keep our former military service members in "service" to their families and communities by collaborating for their brain health.

As a rehabilitation physician and as someone who has worked to recover from a serious, though not service-related, brain injury of my own, I empathize with these injured veterans and their families. Their injuries are greater; their resources are limited. But from my dual perspective of having treated TBI patients while also having lived firsthand with those dark days of depression, I know just how challenging it can be to summon up the motivation and courage to find a new normal — to "turn the lights back on" in a world grown dark.

This May, as we pause to honor all who have worn America's uniform, we as a nation cannot overlook the "invisible" wounds of

war and must commit to providing the best rehabilitative and psychological long-term support for our injured service members, upon and after their return.

If you or someone you know is a veteran who is experiencing one or more signs of traumatic brain injury — headache, blurred vision, difficulty with bright light, ringing in the ears, excessive tiredness, memory loss or poor concentration — seek medical help for yourself or your loved one as early as possible. The good news is that TBI is treatable and its symptoms are manageable with proper treatment.

National Military Appreciation Month is our opportunity — one I believe is an absolute obligation — to honor past and present members of the military. This year, it is a particular occasion to salute those past and present military members who are serving us now in the fight against COVID-19. But it is also our responsibility to speak out on the debt we owe to those who returned home struggling to overcome injuries sustained while serving us.

No one is more deserving of the expert medical care, rehabilitation services and community support that are needed for their successful return to civilian life. Those who get involved in serving our returning heroes, no matter how small a gesture that work may be, will be a saving grace in the eyes of an injured veteran. For those struggling with TBI, you must be the light they are searching for.

Dr. Chrissanne Gordon, author of "Turn the Lights On!" is a physician who has personally struggled to recover from a brain injury, an experience that inspired her to create the national Resurrecting Lives Foundation to help military veterans recover from TBI.

GUEST COMMENT

Answers to PPP and EIDL questions

Many business owners have applied for or received funds from the Paycheck Protection (PPP) and/or Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL). We have received the following questions and want to share information we hope will be helpful.

Q: I've applied for the EIDL or the PPP and have heard nothing back yet. What do I do?

A: You may call the customer service line but be aware there are long wait times. The number is: 800-659-2955. For questions regarding PPP applications you may try contacting your lender. Unfortunately, you may just have to wait as there are tens of thousands of applications, limited staff and amounts of money.

Q: I did not apply during the first go-round of applications for the EIDL. Can I apply now?

A: At this time the EIDL is accepting applications only from agriculture businesses. Keep monitoring the website to see when (and if) they open it up again to other businesses.

Q: I applied during the first round of funding but did not hear anything from SBA. Do I need to reapply?

A: No. Existing applications will be processed on a first come, first-served basis.

Q: I've applied for the EIDL and the loan amount I've received requires collateral. I already have assets mortgaged or with a UCC filing. Do I still qualify for the loan?



Greg Smith

A: Yes, the SBA will take a subordinate position, and if there is no collateral available, borrowers will not be denied the loan.

Q: I heard the maximum EIDL loan has been decreased. Is this true?

A: Yes, the most current information we have is that the maximum loan amount for the EIDL has been reduced to \$150,000.

Q: I received no notification from the EIDL regarding the loan advance (grant), but the money just showed up in my account. Is this normal?

A: Yes. They are just depositing the loan advance into your account so monitor it frequently.

Q: I obtained a PPP loan and want to hire back my employees. However, they are collecting more on unemployment and don't want to return.

A: Those collecting unemployment who turn down work stand a strong chance of losing their benefits except under certain circumstances. As long as you have documented their refusal to return to work you should not be penalized and can hire new employees to meet the required 75% threshold for loan forgiveness.

Q: I've not received either the PPP or EIDL and am self-employed. Can I apply for unemployment?

A: Yes. Under the new Pandemic

Unemployment Insurance Program (PUA), those who are self-employed, are independent contractors, or "gig workers" can apply for unemployment benefits. Visit workinginoregon.org and click the "Cares Act" link in the yellow banner at the top of the page to learn about the program and to apply.

Q: What documentation does the PUA require to apply?

A: You are not required to provide documentation at the time of application but will complete and sign a certification stating the information you provided is true and correct. However, in case your application is reviewed, you will need to have proof of your income. This would include your tax return, 1099's, etc.

Q: As the economy opens, where can I find information on the guidelines required for my business?

A: Visit <https://govstatus.egov.com/or-covid-19>. It will provide you all the latest information specific to your business.

We will continue to provide business owners the most up to date information we have and are here to assist you.

Greg Smith is the director of the Eastern Oregon University Small Business Development Center located at 1607 Gekeler Lane, Room 148, in La Grande. For free, confidential business advising, call 541-962-1532 or email eousbdc@gmail.com.

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