

As I see it: People who don't vote shouldn't get final decision

By Cyrel Gable

Commentary

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I believe that education is the greatest gift we can give our children, and the key to a better future for us all. This has led me to give much of my time to our local schools, as a parent, a volunteer and a former school board member. I am not alone in this cause, as every day I have met and worked with many others who share my passion for our schools. When we have seen a need in our community, we've joined together to pass local options to improve our schools even when Salem has failed us. But I have also seen our work defeated by voters who didn't even bother to vote.

How can that be? Well, since 1996, Oregon's local elections have been decided under the "double majority" rule, which requires that during all elections except the big ones — like this presidential election — local measures must be passed by a majority of eligible voters, regardless of whether they vote or not. That means a no-show counts as a "no" vote. That's right: your thoughtful decision on which way to vote on a local measure is negated by someone who doesn't even bother to show up. Doesn't seem fair? I agree. That's why I'm supporting Measure 56, because I believe that voting matters.

Though Benton County voters usually participate in fairly high numbers, it is still difficult to reach a 50 percent turnout in the smaller elections. These elections occur at odd times of the year, when people are not thinking about voting, and local campaigns rarely have enough money to put out the promotional material necessary to arouse the attention, and overcome the inertia, of all voters.

Therefore, local governments such as the city, county and school district are compelled to pile their measures on to general election ballots, creating unnecessary competition between equally important needs. This has resulted, several times, in only one measure out of two or three winning approval. You might say that shows some measures were better than others. But I would contend that it merely means people are reluctant to approve several things at one time, no matter how worthy they are.

The Benton County's need for continued funding to support basic health and the sheriff department's services failed initially in circumstances like this. Tired of seeing this happen in many communities across the state, a bi-partisan coalition of legislators, including our own Sen. Frank Morse, drafted Measure 56 to return us to the system of voting we've used since the founding of our country.

Measure 56 returns power to Oregonians who vote. The concept of one person, one vote,

is so basic to our democracy that it's one of the first things our kids learn about our form of government. Voting is one of the most important things a citizen can do. And participating in local elections is how we make our voices heard. Local communities have the ability to determine their own priorities for schools, parks, safety and roads through local measures. We shouldn't let an unfair system of voting dreamed up 12 years ago take that right of self-determination away.

Measure 56 restores fairness to local elections by ensuring measures are passed by the majority of participating voters. Now that everyone votes by mail and has weeks to fill out ballots, there's little excuse for non-participation. So let's make sure elections are determined by the people who vote, not by the people who don't. A simple solution that we can all agree on: Vote yes on Measure 56.

Cyrel Gable of Corvallis was a member of the Corvallis School Board from 1995 to 2005.