

Mail Theft and Mail-in Ballots

In rural Oregon near Roseburg mail theft is occurring almost nightly. Mail deliveries have been shoved back to the evening hours due to staffing and mail vehicle shortages, making it difficult for people to pickup their mail until the next morning. On the drive to town, we now see many mail box doors hanging open and the mail in the ditches. Many packages have also been stolen. Good people are retrieving what mail they can, but much is being stolen or lost. When the mail is missing, the victims have to contact creditors to pay bills and arrange to get payment from others in person or by other methods.

Neither the Sheriff's officer nor the Post Office have the resources to find or stop the thieves. There are no P.O. Boxes available for rent at the Post Office. Locking mail boxes are being installed, but some thieves are drilling the locks out. Our mail is not secure.

Using a search engine for the term "rampant mail theft" shows that In cities the thieves target the blue collection boxes on the street corners and amass large amounts of mail. Some thieves have managed to get skeleton keys for the boxes. Rural areas across the country are having the same problems as this area, with the curbside or roadside boxes being the easiest targets. The Post Office does not keep adequate statistics on the problem nation-wide, but it is clear that mail theft incidences have exploded in the last few years. With all this going on, our election officials in Oregon are still insisting that our mail-in ballots are safe and secure.

The safest way to vote has been proven by many statistics; vote in-person and use a paper ballot that is hand counted. Voters may get an absentee ballot at the Clerk and Records Office in-person. After filling out the ballot it can be deposited directly to the "counter ballot box" within the elections office. The Oregon Revised Statutes require that "...at least one voting booth for every 20,000 electors" shall be available. Therefore, there are four voting booths made available at the Douglas County Courthouse hallway outside the Clerk and Records Office. Presently, that is as close to in-person voting as Oregon voters are allowed.

Since the post office can not guarantee delivery of the mail, there may be many voters waiting for their turn to exercise their right to fill out their ballot in one of these four booths at the courthouse. Voting at the courthouse makes it possible for an individual to re-establish the chain-of-custody that ballots had when voting was in-person at the precinct.

With the in-person voting that was conducted at the precinct, the chain of custody stayed intact. The ballot was handed to the voter, the voter filled out the ballot and the ballot was left at the precinct. At the end of the day the ballots handed out would match the ballots collected that day.

In contrast, the ballots that are mailed out will not match what the elections office receives back. The ballots that are used and returned by mail are vulnerable to mail theft out of unsecured mail boxes that are being hit hard across the country. Other ballots are returned as undeliverable. Others will simply go missing and others will be returned through the ballot drop-boxes.

The ballot drop boxes are a spin-off of the mail-in voting system. The boxes are typically not kept under continuous surveillance. Although state laws restrict the depositors to those people that have a close personal relationship to the voter, the enforcement of such laws is very unlikely. There are many videos of people depositing large bundles of ballots that would exceed these limitations.

There are instances of ballot harvesting at nursing homes, homeless shelters and college dorms. Ballot drop boxes have been used to gather the unused ballots from these institutions

and have ended up being used fraudulently. Ballot drop boxes are probably the easiest way to put fraudulent ballots into the election system.

The boxes would automatically become obsolete if the mail-in-voting system were repealed. Until then, there is a local group that is interested in monitoring the legality of each box and are also considering the surveillance of the ballot boxes and documenting how many ballots are deposited into each one.

The Oregon legislature passed a bill last session that allows the counting of a ballot that has no postmark or an illegible postmark if the ballot is received no later than seven calendar days after the election day. That law will make the mail-in ballot even more susceptible to fraud and shows that the legislature is moving in the wrong direction to gain election integrity.

In order to regain the proven method of voting in-person from years past, the precincts need to be revived. The precinct committee persons (PCP's) made the vote-in-person system possible by working at their local precincts during the elections. The Douglas County Clerk's office statistics given in a recent article state that "Currently Douglas County has a total of 642 PCP positions and less than 31% are filled."

The last year has seen a great surge to refill PCP positions. To qualify as a PCP, a person has to be a member of either of the two major political parties for 180 days. Applications are available locally at the party headquarters in Roseburg.

The regular political and legal channels have failed to safeguard our ballots with guaranteed chain-of-custody, now it falls to the voters to bring back election integrity. The voters need to support efforts to get enough signatures on petitions to pass initiatives for the general ballot. If the general election determines a win for eliminating the mail-in ballot, then the security of our ballots will no longer be dependent on what happens through the mailing process and at the ballot drop boxes.

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