Generations Meet at Polls

Older voters in Oregon have made civic engagement a state hallmark. Younger voters may make their own imprint this fall.

November 2008 will cap a year of innovative political engagement techniques, by historically active older voters as well as historically less active younger ones. According to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, about 18 percent of Oregon voters age 18 – 29 turn out for national elections. Those age 50 and older typically hit 70 percent.

Take Bill Gordon of Portland, who turned 100 this year. He has voted in every election since 1932.

Gordon has passed the legacy of civic engagement on to his family, including his grandson, Amit, who will vote for the first time in November. “Voting is a precious right,” the older Gordon said. “It’s our duty and responsibility as citizens and a key to what helps shape our communities and country.”

Gordon has seen a lifetime of voting changes — most significantly in the past 10 years, with the debut of Oregon’s unique vote-by-mail system. With the rise of Amit Gordon’s technologically savvy generation, this year brought new kinds of grassroots engagement: Internet fundraising, pundits on the blogosphere, text-messaged campaign news.

“My friends and I are really excited to work to elect someone who will make a difference on issues that matter to [us],” said Amit. It’s surprising that Americans of any age need to be spurred to vote. Yet, in average turnout since 1945 — about 48 percent — the United States ranks 139th out of 172 countries. The Gordon family hopes that will change this year.

To learn more, visit www.sos.state.or.us/elections. To learn about measures on the ballot, see the insert in this issue.
People

Chuck Richards of Salem was bitten by the political bug when he was 8 years old, stuff ing envelopes for Eisenhower’s presidential campaign. Today he is an AARP advocate at the Oregon state Capitol. He also attends the National Silver Haired Congress in Washington, D.C., as a senator from Oregon. Richards said, “The most important thing to do is to learn what the issues are we’re voting on and then to place a vote for what is right and fair.”

Harold Williams, a Portland businessman, feels strongly about being a civically engaged citizen. He believes we must embrace each other in every arena, and the political process provides the greatest voice. This year’s election feels like the most important election yet in the impact it’s had on him as a person of color. “I never thought I would live to see such a thing happen,” Williams said.

Jackie Jordan, an AARP volunteer from Oregon City, will vote in her first presidential election this year. Jordan was first inspired by politics when her eighth-grade class wrote letters to senators on hot topics. She has continued to share her opinions on pressing issues, including getting involved with Divided We Fail. Jordan said she always remembers her mother’s advice: “The people who rule the world are the ones who show up.”

Get Involved This Fall

The weekends may be full of apple cider and visits to the pumpkin patch, but mark your calendar for other important events going on, too. Get involved in your community through one of the following:


Breast Cancer Awareness Month, October. This recognition was started more than 20 years ago to increase awareness of the disease and raise funds for research into its cause, prevention and cure. Find out more at www.nbcam.org.

Health Literacy Month, October. Learn how you can help promote the importance of understandable health information. Visit www.healthliteracy.com/hl_month.asp.

Caregiving Month, November. Join a free family caregiver teleclass offered by the National Family Caregivers Association. To register, e-mail teleclass@thefamilycaregiver.org with your name and contact information. Check www.aarp.org/or for events and information.

American Diabetes Month, November. Discover community programs and local events about diabetes awareness at www.diabetes.org.

FOR YOUR HEALTH

Health Care Reform: Your Input Needed
Skyrocketing health care costs, affordable prescription drugs and access to quality care are some of the real-life problems facing Oregonians of all ages every day. The Oregon Health Fund Board has developed a draft health care reform plan that would start to solve these problems. The board, whose seven members include AARP Oregon’s Volunteer State President Ray Miao, is presenting the plan at 10 community forums and online this fall. The forums will give community members a chance to hear details, ask questions and give feedback. The plan will be presented for legislative consideration and action by the end of 2008. To find a copy of the draft plan or to send electronic comments, visit http://healthfund-board.oregon.gov/OHPPR/HFB/index.shtml or e-mail OHFRB.info@state.or.us.

Oregon Aims to Boost Nursing Faculty
According to research by the Oregon Center for Nursing, more than 60 percent of the state’s nursing faculty members are projected to retire in just over 10 years. It’s a looming problem that Oregon is working hard to fix. Oregon is one of 18 states with teams involved in nationwide efforts to develop additional capacity in nursing education. The state’s 16-member team, including AARP Oregon, is devising plans to set up incentive programs for nursing faculty and graduate students, such as loan repayments, expanded graduate education programs and eligibility for group health benefits. “AARP knows the critical role that states play in alleviating the nurse and nursing faculty shortage,” said Susan Reinhard, senior vice president of the AARP Public Policy Institute and chief strategist for the Center to Champion Nursing in America. “The Oregon state team has shown true leadership in creating innovative solutions to a complex problem.” For more information, please visit www.oregoncenterfornursing.org.

IN YOUR CORNER

Congress Does the Right Thing on Medicare
Your cries to “Keep Medicare Fair” were heard across the aisles in the nation’s capital as all five of Oregon’s U.S. representatives, along with both U.S. Sens. Gordon Smith (R) and Ron Wyden (D), voted to pass the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act. “The vote is a victory for 44 million Americans — nearly 572,000 of them in Oregon — who depend on Medicare, and we applaud Oregon’s congressional delegation for their support,” said Jerry Cohen, AARP Oregon state director. The initial vote to pass the bill was vetoed by the president but overridden by strong bipartisan support in both houses. The bill sets up a system of electronic prescriptions, curbs escalating Medicare premiums, improves programs for low-income beneficiaries and helps patients maintain access to their doctors. Cohen said the legislation bodes well for broader health care reform in the near future.

On the Stage

Foreigner Tour Celebrates AARP’s 50th
Foreigner is proudly sponsoring the 15-city “Feels Like the First Time Tour” with classic rock band Foreigner, playing on Oct. 17 in Lincoln City at the Chinook Winds Casino Resort. AARP members are eligible for priority seating; call 1-888-244-6665 or visit www.aarp.org/foreigner. Stop by the AARP Oregon info booth before the concert from 6:30 to 8 p.m.

IN Y OUR  C ORNER

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Foreigner founder Mick Jones and band play Lincoln City on Oct. 17. Rock out like Mick for a chance to win his guitar. Log on to www.winnickjonesguitar.com for contest details.

Portland ranks third nationally for its volunteering rate (35.6 percent), says the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Find great ideas for how to get your grandchildren involved in the election this year; visit www.takeyourkids2vote.org.
We Keep an Eagle Eye on Elections

Since becoming secretary of state in 1999, Bill Bradbury (D) has been a national leader on election reform within his role as the state’s second-highest-ranking constitutional officer. Besides overseeing elections, Bradbury directs the state’s audits and archives, and sits on the State Lands Board. His career includes 14 years of elected service in the Oregon Legislature. He will be stepping down at the end of this year and is next considering a gubernatorial run.

Q. Paint us a picture of Oregon’s registered voters, and share the voting statistics of the state’s older voters, those age 50 and older.

A. Oregon’s electorate is pretty evenly split between voters 50 and under and voters over 50, with 48 percent older than 50. It’s also true that more voters over 50 cast ballots than do younger voters. In the May primary, for example, 62 percent of the voters were over 50. And they had a higher turnout, too, with 72 percent of those turning in ballots compared with 42 percent for those 50 and younger.

Q. Oregon is home to a unique vote-by-mail system. What are your thoughts on this system, and do you think other states should adopt it?

A. I think it’s terrific. It saves money, increases turnout, reduces fraud and makes life easier for everyone. I certainly think more states should adopt mail voting, but they should do it gradually, not all at once. It took Oregon 19 years to bring mail voting from the first small, local election to a full general election. It shouldn’t take other states that long, but you can’t jump right into the deep end. Voters and election workers have to get used to it.

Q. Oregon is generally known as the ballot measure state. Tell us about recent efforts to ensure integrity and fairness in the initiative process.

A. I’m very pleased the courts recently praised the courts and do you think other states

from the State Director

Don’t Just Vote — Get Engaged

It’s an exciting time of year: Not only are the leaves changing color, but we are approaching an election that’s changing the shades of politics in our country. We see our elected officials looking at issues beyond red and blue party lines.

It’s not just our elected representatives who have a duty to make change in our communities. We have to take personal responsibility: to vote, to speak up and to engage in a democratic system developed by us, for us.

There are many opportunities to contribute our time and skills to the benefit of ourselves, our loved ones and our communities. They can be as simple as getting grandkids to register to vote or going online at www.aarp.org/or to find ideas to get involved with community organizations. This election year has brought a surge of interest in service — let’s keep that spirit alive during the election and beyond and be a model of the community engagement we expect to hear from our leaders.

“Keep the spirit of service alive through this election and beyond.”

Jerry Cohen leads the AARP Oregon team as state director.

In the 2004 election, 71 percent of older Americans cast ballots; in Oregon the vote has been conducted by mail since 2000.

Find helpful resources for voters with disabilities at www.sos.state.or.us/elections/HAVA; click on the red icon.

Q&A

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A. I’m very pleased the courts recently praised the courts recently praised the way Oregon verifies signatures for initiatives. We rigorously regulate petitioners and check the signatures of the people who sign. We prosecute people for fraud and will continue to investigate all such allegations. New laws went into effect just this year to help us crack down even more and have proved a useful tool to ensure the integrity and fairness of our election system.

Q. You haven’t let your struggle with multiple sclerosis (MS) stop you. What advice would you give others who face an illness or disability?

A. People living with conditions like MS can live happy, healthy and productive lives. I was diagnosed in 1980 and am so lucky that it has progressed very slowly. Attitude is key and I maintain a strong positive attitude. I’m fortunate that my condition has had no impact on my ability to do my job.

To learn more about the Elections Division and other work of the Oregon Secretary of State, visit www.sos.state.or.us. For the full Q&A, visit www.aarp.org/or.
Voter’s Realities Add Pressure for Real Change

After raising five children on her own, Arleta McKillip, 73, knows how life has a tendency to not go as planned. During her career in the financial services industry, McKillip learned the nuances of a confusing system by managing money down to the penny. She credits these experiences with preparing her to cope with unexpected physical and financial challenges.

She didn’t expect to get breast cancer three years ago, costing more than $2,000 in uncovered hospital expenses. She didn’t expect the cancer to require osteoporosis treatment that costs $700 a month, reaching her Medicare D “doughnut hole” in just three months. She didn’t expect to become a mom again by raising her 13-year-old autistic grandson, William, for the last 10 years. And she sure doesn’t know what to expect from national leaders after November.

McKillip, a resident of Eugene, is just one of the hundreds of thousands of Americans struggling to navigate the country’s health care system and hoping to see tangible changes come out of the upcoming presidential election. According to a national survey commissioned by AARP, 96 percent of voters age 50 and older think rising health care costs are important factors in choosing whom to vote for — and 75 percent think personal debt is another.

Health, Money Drive Votes

Like McKillip, 62-year-old Robert Massey of Portland faces many health and economic challenges, including a forced retirement at 57 due to recurring strokes and a potential loss of insurance coverage because his wife had to stop working this year — to battle throat cancer. The realities that Massey and McKillip face every day shape Americans’ expectations of candidates. According to the Pew Research Center in Washington, D.C., voters last year reported that two of the three most important issues facing the primary election were health care and the economy. These issues are still burning questions in November’s election.

Election Brings Concern, Hope

Each month, McKillup pays a combined $1,500 for medications, even with Medicare and her grandson’s limited Oregon Health Plan coverage. “This is not an elective choice for us. For a 73-year-old whose income only comes from Social Security and a small pension, it’s tough,” she said. “What’s scary is that there are millions of others faced with bigger challenges than us — what happens to them?”

Integrity, Transparency Key for Candidates

Over the last 19 months of campaigning much has been said regarding the issues of health care reform and financial security. Nearly 70 percent of Americans age 50 and older find it difficult to pay for gas, food and medicine, according to an AARP survey. It’s no surprise that voters are hungry for real change. They are tired of empty promises and are looking to elect leaders who will take action to make affordable, quality health care and short- and long-term financial security a reality for all Americans.

Massey is hopeful that the country can get “turned around,” but feels that doing so will be contingent on having people in office who will really do the things that they say they will do. As for McKillip, she’s “paying very close attention to what the candidates are saying about issues I care about.... I want to know what the candidate will do, not what they say the other candidate will or won’t do.”

On Nov. 4, Americans have the chance to vote for the candidates they think will best deliver action and answers on the most pressing domestic issues facing our country.

Take the ‘Divided We Fail’ Pledge

Through Divided We Fail, AARP is taking steps to lead a national discussion focused on pressing our elected leaders to propose and stand up for effective solutions to this new reality. Divided We Fail seeks to ensure that all Americans have access to affordable, quality health care and peace of mind about their financial security. To join our efforts, visit www.dividedwefail.org, read our platform and sign the pledge.