



Our lives after Nov. 3

By Pam Marsh, Monday November 16, 2020

Hallelujah! November 3 is behind us.

As ugly as the transition to a new federal administration might become, it cannot match the rancor of the 2020 campaign season.

Now, regardless of our political identities, we wake up every morning in a real community and a real state. This is our world and only we can make it work. Here are a few reflections on the path ahead.

As far as how we make decisions is concerned, representative democracy was a big winner on November 3. As I write, ballots are still being processed, but national turnout in the presidential election is projected to be just under 67% of eligible voters — the most since the election of 1900.

In fact, we have vastly improved our democracy since 1900. At the beginning of the last century, many fewer Americans — mostly just white men — enjoyed the right to vote. In delightful contrast, the 161 million voters who cast ballots this year included the full range of Americans over the age of 18.

Thanks to our well-established vote by mail system, Oregon still leads the nation in eliminating drama and suspicion from the elections process. Still the rest of the nation performed pretty well. For the most part, voters overcame efforts to suppress participation.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, other states scrambled to expand early voting and voting by mail. Of course, few of them matched our participation rate, now close to 80%.

Certainly, the election was not perfect. The polls closed and then we waited and waited and waited. Few of us had absorbed warnings that the outcome of the election could take a

while to calculate. As election day became election week and vote counting went into overtime, we were compelled to confront the stark reality of our deeply divided country.

But now, days after most races have been called, it is time to focus on what comes next.

Elected officials at the federal, state and even local levels will assume their positions in a context of deep division. The red and blue ink on our national electoral map sharply illustrates our partisan discord. Our own state legislature has proved that the legacy of the “Oregon way” does not protect us from animosity and conflict. Even within our own cities and towns, the election process seemed more rancorous than I remember in the past.

And make no mistake — we have a pile of work ahead of us. As a result of the horrific Alameda fire, our region is now ground zero for several of the state’s most intractable issues. We have a housing crisis in a county that already had a 1% vacancy rate. We are grappling with the aftermath of wildfire and trying to understand how to protect ourselves from future disasters.

We need to figure out how to ensure equity and inclusion in the community we rebuild. And we have seen, firsthand, that the victims of climate change are most often our most vulnerable neighbors.

And this disaster came on top of a pandemic that had already significantly impacted our tourism-focused economy.

In this strange and difficult time, it is not hyperbole to state that the work we take on in the next two years will determine the health, safety, and stability of our community for decades to come. We face an all-hands-on-deck kind of situation that will demand the best from elected officials at every level of government.

But the real heavy lifting will come from all of us. Politicians have a role, but our future will reflect the multitude of small and large decisions we make individually each day: going out of our way to patronize a local business hard hit by the pandemic; sharing a spare bedroom with a fire survivor; delivering groceries to the food bank; joining CERT; giving money where it is most needed; or speaking up to ensure that the place we live in is inclusive and welcoming to all.

Civic life can be hard, complicated and messy, but it is always worthwhile. Now, more than ever, every one of us needs to step up to take care of our community.

Thank you for voting. But even more, thank you for your partnership in the work ahead.

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