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QuickPoint! – Dumbing Down Voters

By John A. Charles, Jr.

In 2016 Val Hoyle, then a legislator from Eugene, introduced a bill to guarantee postage-paid envelopes for Oregon's vote-by-mail system. She argued that having to find and apply a stamp was a barrier to voter participation, especially to young people.

That idea was widely ridiculed, and the bill died.

Unfortunately, the political culture has changed. In March the Oregon legislature quietly passed SB 861, which requires the state to pay for ballot envelopes that can be returned by business reply mail. It will go into effect on or after January 1, 2020.

Implementation will cost an estimated \$1.6 million to the state General Fund for the first 18 months. There will be an additional cost to Counties of \$84,000 to destroy obsolete ballot return envelopes.

Is Oregon really so wealthy that we should spend \$1.6 million just to ensure that voters don't have to find a first class stamp? I don't think so. Instead of treating postage as a voting barrier, perhaps we should treat it as an entrance exam.

The test would be simple: If you can't figure out how to use stamps, or you are incapable of hand-delivering your ballot to the county elections office, you are not qualified to vote.

We might get better results.

John A. Charles, Jr. is President and CEO of Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon's free market public policy research organization.