

Bennett Minton
Portland, Oregon

February 15, 2023

House Rules Committee
Oregon Legislative Assembly
Re: HB 2585

Chair Fahey, members of the committee:

I write to oppose HB 2585. It appears to be a radical alternative to problems Rep. Morgan has found. Modest administrative solutions are likely available without statutory reversion to opt-in voter registration.

Because I am a journalist, I read the hearing record—more than 200 statements submitted in 22 hours. Overwhelmingly supporting the bill, a sizeable number consisting of a single sentence, the record is a depressing collection of assertions from the Disinformation Zone.

To be charitable, I see confusion about the roles of the DMV, county registrar and Secretary of State. Some witnesses believe DMV should have nothing to do with the process. It's an opinion. Of course, DMV is an agency, and governments frequently charge agencies with different tasks.

Mostly the hearing record is irrelevant to the bill and reflects assertions, without facts, disseminated by Donald Trump and his January 6 acolytes.

Writes Carla Pletka, whose statement represents many supporting the bill: "It is a personal responsibility to take the initiative to register to vote. Not out of convenience. It is the highest privilege as an American citizen." Wrote Sloan Neal: "Voting is a sacred trust granted to qualified citizens."

The right to vote is nowhere in the Constitution until the 14th Amendment. But there it is—a right, not a privilege "granted" by the state. All but two states (Maine and Vermont) take it away upon conviction of a felony, a development that stems from the post-Reconstruction South, when the former Confederates began enacting felony laws and tying them to the franchise to suppress Black people from exercising it. Before the Civil War, most states didn't require citizenship to vote, although many limited the vote to White male property owners.

David Klaus sums it up: "The voting franchise has been made far too easy in Oregon, thereby increasing the likelihood of fraud, especially by non citizens." Pamela Wimmer writes: "This Motor Voter law along with mail-in voting has caused the people in Oregon to become lazy about registering and voting."

Perhaps more to the point, Steven Newton writes: "As a resident of Oregon for over 6 decades, I have seen the State transition from a conservative majority to a progressive liberal majority. The automatic enrollment for voter registration is just another example of this change."

Last week the committee heard testimony about information deserts and the decline of community newspapers. Heartbreaking was the appearance of a high school student who told you he hadn't been allowed to watch the news or read the paper when he was growing up.

How the legislature addresses our education void, inability to distinguish opinion from fact, or antipathy to change is beyond the scope of the bill. But reversing the opt-out system won't help.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bennett Newton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.