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Too nice for voter fraud? Some say OR election system vulnerable despite few cases

By [Shelby Sebens](#) / May 16, 2013 / [No Comments](#)



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By Shelby Sebens | Northwest Watchdog

PORTLAND – Two dead people tried to vote in Oregon.

The researcher and a voter integrity advocate who found the problem told election officials, who told them this kind of thing is rare, and the chances of it happening again are slim, given the state’s good track record, kindly nature and all that.

“This is a very Oregon moment,” researcher **Robert McCullough** of the energy consulting firm [McCullough Research](#) (<http://www.mresearch.com/homepage.html>) said. “The Pacific Northwest is a very honest area, and so we have little in the way of checks and balances. But, luckily, we also have very few villains.”



(<http://watchdog.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/blogs.dir/1/files/2013/05/electionmail.jpg>)

TOO NICE? Could Oregon be susceptible to voter fraud?

McCullough, whose resume includes work as an expert witness in the **Enron** scandal, earlier this year did a study comparing Oregon's active voter rolls with the Social Security Administration's Master Death list. Of Oregon's nearly 2.2 million active voters, he found 92 were probably dead.

"This is hardly an endemic problem," McCullough acknowledged. "Is it a situation where someone could in fact swing a close election by dishonest activities, certainly they could."

Others are more worried, afraid the perception of friendly and honest Oregonians can obscure potential trouble.

One of those people, **Janice Dysinger**, commissioned the study as a private citizen but now works as Oregon's team leader for [True the Vote](http://www.trueethevote.org/) (<http://www.trueethevote.org/>), a voter integrity advocacy group.

"I'm quite concerned that there are people on the voter rolls that shouldn't be there," she said.

Dysinger and McCullough were able to track down death certificates for two of the "dead" voters. One was caught by a bad signature and the vote didn't count, the other sent to the Secretary of State's Office for further investigation, Dysinger said.

Tony Green, **Oregon Secretary of State** spokesman, said he could confirm one case out of the 92 has been sent to the Oregon Department of Justice for further investigation. He said the state was provided with five names from the list of possible dead voters and that four were found to still be alive. Since 2000, the state has had 13 cases of voter fraud out of 24 million ballots mailed. A Clackamas County [elections worker](http://www.bizjournals.com/portland/news/2013/04/25/clackamas-election-worker-gets.html) (<http://www.bizjournals.com/portland/news/2013/04/25/clackamas-election-worker-gets.html>) was convicted earlier this year for altering ballots.

Green sees integrity in the system, but the state is not satisfied.

"We're constantly looking for ways to improve the integrity of the centralized voter registry," he said.

Kate Titus, executive director of [Common Cause for Oregon](http://www.commoncause.org/site/pp.asp?c=dKLNK1MQIwG&b=4846313) (<http://www.commoncause.org/site/pp.asp?c=dKLNK1MQIwG&b=4846313>), a nonprofit advocacy agency focused on giving people a voice in the political system, said any potential case of voter fraud should be taken seriously and investigated.

But she questions whether it's really a problem.

"These claims repeatedly turn out to be [unfounded](http://www.brennancenter.org/issues/voter-fraud) (<http://www.brennancenter.org/issues/voter-fraud>)," she said. "Voter fraud is extraordinarily rare." She accused True the Vote of exaggerating voter fraud to push a political agenda that suppresses voters.

McCullough also did a study in 2010 on the security of Multnomah County's election system and found the potential for problems. He said a computer in the office could be hacked and an outcome of an election changed.

Green said the state has spent \$3 million over the past four years in federal **Help America Vote Act** money to upgrade computer systems across the state.

But Dysinger is not persuaded, and she has concerns about the system overall. She and other voter integrity advocates are watching pending legislation in the Oregon Legislature, hoping it fails.

“I’m very concerned about our election process here in Oregon,” she said.

Specifically, she opposes [legislation](http://www.leg.state.or.us/13reg/measpdf/hb3500.dir/hb3521.intro.pdf) (http://www.leg.state.or.us/13reg/measpdf/hb3500.dir/hb3521.intro.pdf) that would use Oregon DMV data to automatically register voters. Dysinger and Republican lawmakers say the proposed legislation lacks safeguards to keep noncitizens or out-of-state residents from voting.

Common Cause and the **League of Women Voters of Oregon** support the legislation. **Norman Turrill**, specialist on elections and campaign finance for the League of Women Voters, said he, too, doubts there is much of a risk of voter fraud in Oregon.

“In the League’s view, the state elections system and the election division in particular is well run,” he said. “The county clerks seem to be doing their job diligently.”

The Legislature is also considering a [bill](http://www.leg.state.or.us/13reg/measpdf/hb2100.dir/hb2199.a.pdf) (http://www.leg.state.or.us/13reg/measpdf/hb2100.dir/hb2199.a.pdf) that removes a statute requiring elections officials to destroy unused ballots the night of the election. Dysinger and McCullough say failure to destroy ballots opens the system to more security problems.

“As one elections official said during our review: ‘These things don’t happen in Oregon.’ I honestly believe this is true,” McCullough said in his email to state Senators last year. “However, making sure that they continue to not happen here does involve taking prudent measures to avoid security breaches.”

Contact Shelby Sebens at Shelby@NorthwestWatchdog.org

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