

# Oregon at a crossroads

With this November's election, the eyes of the nation could be focused on Oregon.

We have a crowded ballot, with races for U.S. senator and governor, and initiatives to legalize marijuana and require labeling of GMO-modified agricultural products.

But that's not why the nation may be watching.

Measure 88, the Oregon Safe Roads bill, would authorize the state to issue driver's cards for residents who otherwise qualify to drive, but who do not have all the documents required for a full license. Our industry cannot afford to let this election go by without our full involvement.

When the Oregon Legislature first approved this legislation back in 2013 as Senate Bill 833, it took hard work and cooperation. The Oregon Association of Nurseries and the Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association pulled together what might have been the largest and most diverse coalition ever assembled in state history.

We gained the support of faith leaders, law enforcement, labor unions, business groups, agricultural groups, civil liberties watchdogs, and immigrant rights advocates. The bill attracted strong, bipartisan support, and Gov. John Kitzhaber signed it into law.

Thanks to Oregon's stout referendum process, a small group of vocal opponents gathered enough signatures to put the driver's card bill on the ballot, and we, as a state, now find ourselves at a fork in the road.

Yankee baseball great Yogi Berra once said, "If you come to a fork in the road, take it." Which fork will Oregon voters choose this November?

## Labor shortages and economic consequences

After a long economic downturn, nursery industry sales and prospects are finally looking up. Many in Oregon have had their best year in recent memory. It is a tribute to the plant material grown and sold in our fine state.

But a deep shadow is hanging over our industry. Without adequate labor, we can't get product to market.

I have heard firsthand reports from OAN members about this growing labor shortage. The failure of Oregon's driver's card measure could exacerbate this problem. In practical terms, the lack of labor will inhibit a nursery's ability to plant, grow and ship material — in essence placing an economic cap on how good a year could be.

The business community saw this train coming several years ago and commissioned a peer-reviewed economic study to predict what would happen to Oregon if we lost our undocumented workforce.

The numbers were staggering. The Oregon economy would shrink by \$17.7 billion, causing an immediate job loss (of nonagricultural workers) of 173,000, adding 7.7 percentage points to the unemployment rate. In other words, unemployment would more or less double. Oregon would lose

\$650 million in tax revenue immediately.

For a state that already has a hard time funding public safety, education, health care, and programs that impact the agricultural sector, that's not good.

Opponents of the measure vilify the undocumented population. That's no surprise. But they refuse to own the economic carnage their wishes could cause. We have already seen it happen in states that passed hardline legislation, such as Arizona, Georgia and Alabama.

We all know the immigration system is broken. The situation is at a boiling point. But Oregonians must realize that allowing all residents to participate in the economy and to get to work is a pro-jobs position.

We cannot let people who say they are pro-business disembowel the very traded sectors that our state and our economy are depending on.



**By Jeff Stone**  
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## What it does

Voting yes on Measure 88 provides a common-sense approach to keep our communities safe. It creates a limited-purpose and limited-duration driver's card for qualified applicants living and working in Oregon.

A driver's card will help Oregon residents follow the law. It will improve safety for drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians by reducing the number of uninsured and untested drivers on the road.

Immigrant families, workers, seniors and refugees are among the thousands of Oregonians who need this option to get to work, church and school. To get a driver's card, Oregon residents have to pass a written test as well as a behind-the-wheel driving test, and provide proof of residence, identity and date of birth.

Let's also be clear about what Measure 88 is not.

A driver's card cannot be used as identification for air travel, to enter a federal building, to register to vote, or to obtain any government benefit requiring proof of citizenship or lawful presence in the United States.

Congress has repeatedly failed to address our broken immigration system. Partisan gridlock has once again ground everything to a halt back in Washington, D.C.

California, Washington, Nevada and six other states have driver's card programs. People in these and other states will be watching to see what Oregon does. Instead of waiting for politicians in Congress to act, we have the chance to implement a common-sense fix now to make our roads and communities safer. That is why the OAN is supporting Ballot Measure 88.

Democracy is not a spectator sport. I encourage you to get into the political game and vote. ©

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Stone'.