

Voter apathy

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Chair of Law and Politics for 2000.

"Attitudes of disenchantment have escalated in the American electorate," she said. "It's true of Americans in general."

The rise of "big money" in politics contributes to the increasing disenchantment of voters, Piven said, and the slick "party politicians" of today make it difficult for voters to distinguish between their ideas.

"They're all saying the same thing," she said. "It's almost impossible to figure out that they're not saying the same thing; they're all for saving Social Security, reducing the deficit and cutting taxes."

While Oregon voters are more likely to turn out in presidential elections than voters in other states, according to statistics from the Federal Elections Commission, many students don't vote. An average of 77 percent of Oregon voters have turned out for presidential elections in the last 20 years, versus the average of roughly 50 percent of registered American voters across the nation.

But Amy Cody, an assistant to the secretary of state, said it has been a challenge to get students to vote, and that student voter turnout has been lower compared to the general population.

"We talk with a lot of citizens who lead such busy lives, they don't even have the basic information like where to vote, when to vote or where to get unbiased information," Cody said. "The ballot is often overwhelming, and a lot of people feel they're not educated enough, or that the issues are not that important or relevant to them."

And student voters seem even less likely to vote in local elections, Cody said. She suggested that since most of the student population is transient, moving between their hometown and Eugene each year, students often don't vote in elections in either place.

DeFazio

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hair."

As the state's longest-serving congressman, DeFazio, 52, said he is proud to represent such an "incredibly diverse" district, one that stretches from Sweet Home south to Brookings. He said commuting to the capital from his home in Springfield, instead of the other way around, has helped keep him in touch with his constituency and, he joked, annually earns him 20,000 frequent flyer bonus miles.

Among those in attendance Tuesday were political friends state Sen. Susan Castillo, city Councilor David Kelly, state Rep. Floyd Prozanski and County Commissioner Bill Dwyer.

"The bottom line for Peter is who are the winners and who are the losers when legislation is introduced," Dwyer said. "He fights for the losers. He stands for fairness and justice, and he'll do a good job in the next session of Congress."

DeFazio currently serves on the House Resource Committee, which has jurisdiction over the Bonneville Power Administration; is a member of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee; and is the ranking democrat on the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation subcommittee.

Originally from Needham, Mass., DeFazio received his undergraduate and master's degrees from the University and served on the Lane County Board of Commissioners from 1982-86. He is recognized for passionate views on trade policy, issues addressing the environment and his role in founding the Progressive Caucus, which he

Each vote counts

For voters who think that "one vote won't make a difference," the Federal Elections Commission offers several examples of when it has:

Robert Emond won the race for Vermont state representative in 1977 against Sydney Nixon, 572 to 571.

A Lansing, Mich., school district millage proposition failed in 1989, with the final recount produced a tie vote, 5,147 for and 5,147 against. The result meant that the school district had to reduce its budget by \$2.5 million.

Republican Randall Luthl and Independent Larry Call tied for the seat in the Wyoming House of Representatives from the Jackson Hole area in 1994, with 1,941 votes each. Luthl was finally declared the winner when, in a drawing before the State Canvassing Board, a ping-pong ball with his name on it was pulled from the cowboy hat of Gov. Mike Sullivan.

SOURCE: Federal Elections Commission

"The statistics show that people in our age group overwhelmingly don't vote," said Kristina Saleh, an assistant director of public information for Project Vote Smart. "For many people, it's that they don't want to feel manipulated — they want to know their vote counts for something."

Many student voters are also suspicious of many political candidates, Saleh said, believing the candidates will say or do anything to win their vote.

Whatever the reasons behind low voter turnout, elections officials stressed the importance of exercising the right to vote. With the November presidential election and the large number of measures on the ballot, Cody said there are issues and initiatives that will affect everyone.

Solutions to increasing voter turnout

The Internet is the wave of the future for getting students politically involved, Saleh said. It's the most important source for gathering political information for about 70 percent of 18- to 25-year-olds, according to a recent Project Vote Smart poll — a fact that struck Saleh as a sign of the times.

"The Internet appeals to people because it offers all the information right at their fingertips," Saleh said. "It's also a sign students are voting smarter and opening them-

formed in response to Newt Gingrich's Contract for America.

"He's shown himself to be a leader in many areas," local activist Norma Grier said. "He's been an outspoken critic on the public's right to know, and I've personally seen him shopping at local farmer's markets."

Grier also commented on the congressman's participation in marches with protesters in Seattle last November against the World Trade Organization as testament to his enthusiasm for grass-roots organizing. "Standing shoulder-to-shoulder with activists in the streets of Seattle," she said, "I think that says a lot about the man DeFazio is."

To date, two Republican challengers have announced plans to unseat the seven-term congressman: John Lindsey, a county commissioner from Albany, and Capt. Wendell Robinson of the Winston-Dillard Fire Department. Conducting a word-of-mouth campaign thus far in Southern Oregon, Robinson said he's filed for the race because he believes it's time for a change.

"I consider myself a conservative," he said. "And I'd like to see some conservative representation I don't think we have now."

After enlisting a number of agenda items still needing work in Washington, including a patient's bill of rights, opposing school vouchers and special interest groups, DeFazio concluded his re-election speech by promising to reaffirm his commitment on such issues.

"Something is wrong when the list is longer than when I first was elected," he said. "But I'm still up to the fight, I'm willing to go against the grain even if I have to stand alone."

the current two-party system will have a positive impact on American politics and revive the influence of voters.

"If they succeed in threatening the major parties by attracting a large number of votes, the major political parties will be forced to address the issues they raise," Piven said. "It's far less likely that they'll capture the White House, but it's less important that they capture the White House than if they succeed in reforming the major parties."

Many voters have complained about candidates' using negative campaigning tactics or spending too much money on their cam-

panies up to more information."

As a result of the poll, Project Vote Smart has focused on making most of its voter awareness information available on-line to attract more students.

Some student voters who feel shut out of the two-party political system have watched with interest as other political parties like the Reform Party have gained national attention.

Piven said she hopes the emergence of political parties outside

paings. But Americans are not going to eliminate propaganda or the role of money in politics, Piven said. Instead, voters should concentrate on limiting the role money and propaganda plays in elections.

Focusing more on forming social movements will force the politicians to carry out the will of the American voters, she said.

"Students should try to see the levers that are available to them in two-party politics," Piven said. She said the best way for voters to get their voices heard is to join political action committees and other organizations and to participate in more grass-roots social movements.



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