

Libertarian Party to field 32 candidates in Oregon

The anti-tax candidates might affect several races, one expert says

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALEM — The Libertarian Party, which seeks to reduce the size and reach of government, plans to field a record 32 candidates in Oregon's general election.

While it's unlikely that any of the candidates will win, the anti-tax party

could affect several races. Its members campaigned actively over the winter to defeat a ballot measure that would have raised taxes.

Voters rejected that tax increase 59 percent to 41 percent, giving the party hope that its candidates will resonate with Oregon voters this fall.

"I have not seen Libertarians have this good a chance at influencing candidate elections since the mid-1970s," said Jim Moore, a political science professor at Pacific University.

Like Democrats, Libertarians support abortion rights, assisted suicide and other social causes that limit government telling people how to live their lives. But they also disdain taxes and big government — traditional Republican territory.

The Libertarian slate includes nearly two dozen legislative candidates, including former gubernatorial candidate Tom Cox, who won almost 5 percent of the vote when Democrat Ted Kulongoski defeated Republican

Kevin Mannix in 2002.

This time, Cox hopes to defeat Rep. Mary Gallegos, R-Cornelius, one of 11 House Republicans who voted for the tax increase that voters ultimately rejected.

"Tom will be the guinea pig to watch," Moore said. "He has never done a serious campaign. Will we see it this time?"

Libertarians could also play a role in several other House races that have no incumbent, such as House District 54, which Rep. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, will give up.

Libertarian Tristan Reisfar is taking on Democrat Judy Stiegler and Republican Chuck Burley, both of whom he says support tax and fees increases.

"At the very least, I will force candidates to take hard stances on some of these issues," Reisfar says.

Mannix, the Oregon Republican Party chairman, said he's telling members to "stop paying any attention" to Libertarian candidates, who he says have little in common with Republicans.

But the tax issue is important enough that some Republicans wouldn't mind seeing a Democrat defeat a Republican.

Tax activist Don McIntire said the Executive Club, a decades-old conservative group to which he belongs, voted to back Cox against Gallegos.

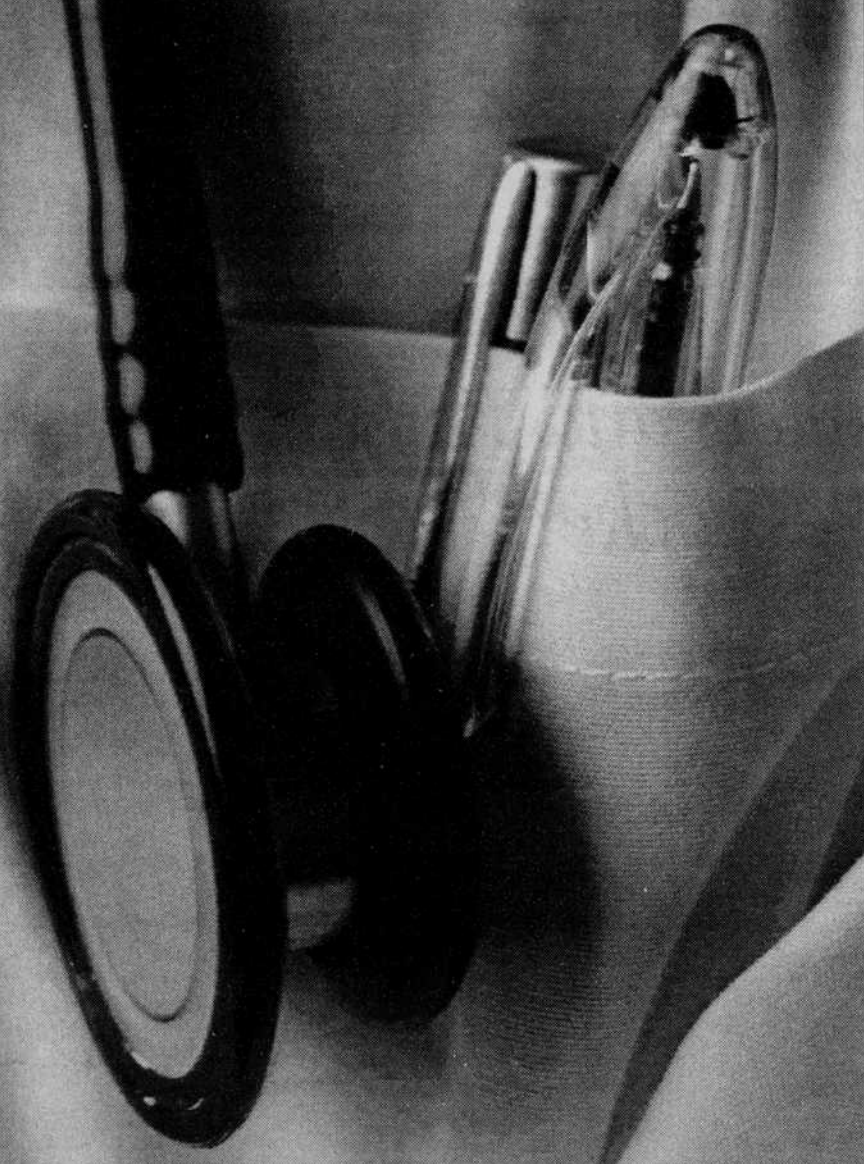
"There's a chance his entry into the race could deliver the votes for the Democrat, but on balance, we've decided that's better than continuing with somebody who's a lousy Republican," McIntire said.

Gallegos responds that voters "want somebody making tough decisions in Salem," even if they don't agree on every issue.

Unlike the two major parties, the Libertarian Party, Oregon's third-largest, lacks money for mailings and the hordes of volunteers to knock on doors. But Richard Burke, the party's executive director in Oregon, said the party is maturing and gaining clout.

"It all boils down to that we decided we're going to be a political party," he said.

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