



Max Denning graphic

This graph represents the 40 years from 1966 to 2006 that Eastern Oregon and Multnomah County went from a gap of three percent in Democratic Party registration to a gap of 30 percent. The dotted line (top) is voter registration for the Democratic Party in Multnomah County, while the solid gray line (bottom) is voter registration of Democrats in Eastern Oregon.

DIVIDE

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years, Henkels said, the metro areas across the country have economically boomed and the rural areas have fallen behind.

This lack of growth can be paired with political changes in the affiliations of the political parties in the late 1970s into the 1980s, Henkels said.

"The Republicans started raising more cultural issues that (caused) lower-income working and middle class people (to) start second-guessing whether the Democrats represented their cultural values," Henkels said.

According to Cornell University's Roper Center for Public Opinion Research — one of the world's leading archives of social science data, specializing in data from public opinion surveys and information on voters in presidential elections beginning in 1976 — Jimmy Carter received 57 percent of the lower-income working class vote and 62 percent of voters in union households in 1976. Just four years later, Carter received only 48 percent of these groups' votes in an election he lost to Republican Ronald Reagan. In 1984, Reagan received 58 percent of the lower working class vote and 46 percent of voters in union households.

In addition to the Republican Party becoming more popular among the lower-income working class, the Democratic Party also lost support in Oregon's numerous timber towns, partially due to issues such as protecting the spotted owl. Henkels said Democrats in Portland were blamed by rural communities for the controversy.

According to the Oregon Encyclopedia, "When District Judge William Dwyer prohibited national forest timber sales in potential spotted owl habitat in May 1991 ... (his) decision, among other factors, sharply reduced timber harvests on federal land, the greatest reductions taking place in Oregon and Washington."

Democrats began to become the party of preservation, which alienated rural Oregonians.

"As Democrats embraced environmentalism strongly, it translated in rural Oregon to (the Democratic Party) being against them and their resource-based communities and economies," Henkels said.

The Associated Oregon Loggers estimated the average annual statewide timber harvest in the 1980s was 7.52 billion board feet. In 1990s, the harvest dropped to 4.71 billion board feet per year, and in the 2000s it fell even further to 3.83 billion board feet per year.

"The decline of the tim-

ber industry created much stronger differentials between the rural areas and Portland," Henkels said. "At one time, Portland was a timber town and a really blue collar town. It wasn't that much different from all the mill towns in Oregon."

In addition to Portland's increased population and wealth, the Democratic Party's loss of support among the lower-middle class and the environmental issues alienating Oregonians in the timber industry, another factor in Oregon's polarization is the change in demographics across the state.

Oregon as a whole has long had a large majority of white people, but Portland has diversified over the last several decades, while the rest of the state has done so at a much slower rate.

In 1990, the earliest demographic data available from the U.S. Census Bureau, Oregon was 91 percent white. In 2010, the state was 78 percent white. Portland, however, was 72.2 percent white, meaning the rest of state remains almost 80 percent white.

Historically, members of minority communities are more likely to vote for Democratic candidates. Since 1980, black and Hispanic voters have voted consistently for Democrats. In 2016, black voters voted for Hillary Clinton by a 80 point margin, while Hispanic voters voted for Clinton by a 36 point margin.

The quantifiable political polarization

In light of Oregon's political rural-urban divide, what would change if instead of Portland deciding almost every statewide election, Northeast Oregon did? Specifically, what would happen if the state's elections were placed in the hands of voters from Baker, Union and Willamette counties?

In 2018, Oregon had five statewide measures on the ballot. Only Measure 103 — which allows local bonds for financing affordable housing with nongovernmental entities — passed, and no election had more than a 10 percent margin of victory. Portland voted overwhelmingly for Measure 103 — more than 71.72 percent of the vote — and overwhelmingly against each of the other measures.

In turn, Oregon rejected measures that would have prohibited any future taxes on groceries, would have expanded the application of a required three-fifths legislative majority to raise revenue, would have overturned the state's undocumented immigrant sanctuary state law, and would have prohibited the spending of public funds on abortion.

In Northeast Oregon, there was agreement with

Portland on only one of these measures. Baker, Union and Willamette counties also rejected the expanded application of the legislative three-fifths majority. Otherwise the vast majority of voters in these three counties voted the opposite of Portland voters.

While Gov. Kate Brown was expected to be challenged by Republican Knute Buehler on election night, the incumbent cruised to a victory by a seven-point margin. Buehler's popularity — or Brown's lack thereof — in rural Oregon would have led to a crushing defeat for Brown if Northeast Oregon called the shots in the state. Buehler received 67.91 percent, 72.99 percent and 66.17 percent, respectively, in Union, Baker and Willamette counties. The only governor who has been close to as popular in Oregon as Buehler was in NE Oregon was John Kitzhaber in 1998 when he received 64.4 percent of the vote.

Will there ever be "one Oregon"?

Henkels and his colleagues' paper was included in a 2011 book titled "Toward One Oregon" that is described as "examining the prospects for uniting our geographically diverse state in the years ahead."

The paper co-authored by Henkels admits it presents few "reasons to be optimistic that the divide between rural and urban Oregon can easily be bridged," but it does offer "glimmers of hope" by suggesting ways the state government may be able to diminish the gap.

The paper notes the Eastern Oregon region will likely become more diverse as time progresses, and more tied to technological advances, making it more similar to the Portland area. The strongest way for Oregon to become less divided, the paper argues, is for a rural economic revitalization.

"More than anything else, if the state government took steps to help booster the economic position of the rural communities, the rural and urban areas would no longer be as divided by differences in economic well-being," the paper concludes. "As a result, one might find more agreement on other policy issues."

Henkels acknowledged in an interview with The Observer there are other differences in principles between the rural and urban parts of the state.

"As long as the state is divided along different values and ideologies, it will be hard to find common ground," Henkels said. "Agreement will only be reached when the political values and ideologies held by Oregonians become more alike, or alternatively, less all encompassing."

GOP and Democrats trade blame for shutdown, no deal in sight

By Juliet Linderman, Lisa Mascaro and Zeke Miller
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The partial government shutdown will almost certainly be handed off to a divided government to solve in the new year, as both parties traded blame Friday and President Donald Trump sought to raise the stakes in the weeklong impasse.

As agreement eludes Washington in the waning days of the Republican monopoly on power, it sets up the first big confrontation between Trump and newly empowered Democrats. Trump is sticking with his demand for money to build a border wall with Mexico, and Democrats, who take control of the House on Jan. 3, are refusing to give him what he wants.

Trump raised the stakes on Friday, reissuing threats to shut the U.S.-Mexico border to pressure Congress to fund the wall and to cease aid to three Central American countries from which many migrants have fled.

The president also signaled he was in no rush to seek a resolution, welcoming the fight as he heads toward his own bid for re-election in 2020. He tweeted Thursday evening that Democrats may be able to block him now, "but we have the issue, Border Security. 2020!"

The shutdown is forcing hundreds of thousands of federal workers and contractors to stay home or work without pay, and many are experiencing mounting stress from the impasse. It also is beginning to pinch citizens who count on varied public services. Gates are closed at some national parks, the government won't issue new federal flood insurance policies and in New York, the chief judge of Manhattan federal courts suspended work on civil cases involving U.S. government lawyers, including several civil lawsuits in which Trump himself is a defendant.

With another long holiday

weekend coming and nearly all lawmakers away from the Capitol there is little expectation of a quick fix.

"We are far apart," White House press secretary Sarah Sanders told CBS on Friday, claiming of Democrats, "They've left the table all together."

Incoming acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney said Democrats are no longer negotiating with the administration over an offer made back on Saturday to accept less than the \$5 billion Trump wants for a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Democrats said the White House offered \$2.5 billion for border security, but Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer told Vice President Mike Pence it wasn't acceptable.

"There's not a single Democrat talking to the president of the United States about this deal," Mulvaney said Friday. He told Fox News Trump had canceled his plans to travel to Florida for New Year's.

Mulvaney added of the shutdown: "We do expect this to go on for a while."

Democrats brushed off the White House's attempt to cast blame.

"For the White House to try and blame anyone but the president for this shutdown doesn't pass the laugh test," said Justin Goodman, a spokesman for Schumer.

House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi has vowed to pass legislation as soon as she takes the gavel, which is expected when the new Congress convenes, to reopen the nine shuttered departments and dozens of agencies now hit by the partial shutdown.

"If they can't do it before Jan. 3, then we will do it," said Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., incoming chairman of the Rules Committee. "We're going to do the responsible thing. We're going to behave like adults and do our job."

But even that may be difficult without a compromise because the Senate will

remain in Republican hands and Trump's signature will be needed to turn any bill into law. Negotiations continue between Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill, but there's only so much Congress can do without the president.

Trump is not budging, having panned Democratic offers to keep money at current levels — \$1.3 billion for border fencing, but not the wall. Senate Republicans approved that compromise in an earlier bill with Democrats but now say they won't be voting on any more unless something is agreed to by all sides, including Trump.

"I think it's obvious that until the president decides he can sign something — or something is presented to him — that we are where we are," said Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan., who opened the Senate on Thursday for a session that lasted only minutes.

"Call it anything," he added. "barrier, fence, I won't say the 'w' word."

Trump long promised that Mexico would pay for the wall, but Mexico refuses to do so. It was unclear how Trump's threat to close the border would affect his efforts to ratify an amended North American free trade pact.

He has also repeatedly threatened to cut off U.S. aid to countries he deems insufficient partners in combating illegal immigration, but has thus far failed to follow through with those threats. Experts have warned cutting off aid money to

El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras could actually exacerbate the problem by worsening the poverty and violence that push many migrants to leave those countries.

And it is Congress, not the president, which appropriates aid money. The White House would have to notify Congress if it wanted to cut or reallocate aid, which could delay or complicate the process.



Cherise Kaechele / The Observer

The La Grande Forestry and Range Sciences Lab on Gekeler Lane has a sign posted on the door explaining why the office is closed.

SHUTDOWN

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done," Burton said.

One of the furloughed employees is with the Farm Service Agency and another is with Rural Development. The furloughed Rural Development employee is the lone employee the office has, which means it is closed and will remain so throughout the shutdown, Burton said.

The USDA's Rural Development office provides loans for housing and other building development work in rural communities.

The Farm Service Agency provides govern-

ment loans to farmers for operating expenses. The loans can be used for the purchase of items such as fertilizer and fuel. The La Grande Farm Service Agency office will remain open through today, according to a statement from the FSA.

"During a government shutdown, agencies that have funds appropriated in prior years that are carried forward can continue to serve customers until that money is used up. As a result, FSA county offices will remain open through Friday, Dec. 28," the statement said.

Burton said his Natural

Resource Conservation service office has enough funding to continue operating through at least Jan. 4, 2019.

"If the shutdown goes longer than that, we will have to re-evaluate (on whether to keep operating)," Burton said.

Major projects the Natural Resource Conservation Service works on include the restoration of riparian habitat on portions of the Grande Ronde River. The NRCS works closely with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Bonneville Power Administration on these projects.



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