

Voters mostly opted out, but were clear on economic issues

They didn't see compelling difference between the parties

By JEFF JOHNSON

A lot of Republicans won on Nov. 4, here in Washington and around the country. Contrary to the pronouncements of political operatives, there was not a repudiation of one party's values and the crowning of another's. The truth is the majority of those registered to vote, chose not to.

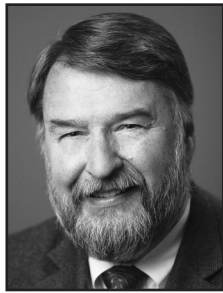
I would suggest that they chose not to vote because they didn't see a compelling enough difference between the two parties or a compelling enough difference between competing visions. The 2014 election cycle was not characterized by a robust debate over different ideas and values. And as a result, who got elected was determined more by who didn't vote than by which party did the better job of getting their partisans to vote.

Two things were striking about this election — low voter turnout and the passage of a number of economic fairness measures introduced in blue, red, and purple states.

While election results are not yet final in Washington state, far fewer than 50 percent of registered voters exercised their democratic right. Very telling was the fact that only about 16 percent of registered youth, 25 percent of registered people of color, and 18 percent of registered single women under the age of 50 voted. The fact is the overwhelming majority of this portion of the rising American electorate chose not to vote.

But it would be wrong to deduce that it is just a turnout issue. People don't turn out to vote for reasons. They don't turn out because they don't see the issues important to their lives being discussed in a cogent and robust way. Interestingly enough, though, in states where simple economic fairness measures were on the ballot, they passed overwhelmingly.

Increasing the minimum wage was on the ballot in Arkansas, Alaska, Illinois, Nebraska, South Dakota, as well as Oakland and San Francisco, California. Each minimum wage measure passed overwhelmingly — the lowest



vote total was in South Dakota where it passed by 55 percent of the vote.

Paid sick leave passed in Massachusetts; Oakland, California; and Trenton and Montclair, New Jersey. A pay equity measure passed in Oregon, and a measure to lower mass incarceration

passed in California.

The city of Anchorage defeated a so-called "right to work" measure, and Missouri defeated an amendment to restrict collective bargaining rights for teachers.

And transportation and mass transit funding measures passed in Georgia, Maryland, Rhode Island and Wisconsin.

American voters understand measures and candidates that run on economic fairness issues, and measures that create needed infrastructure and jobs. This is not rocket science. This is about a fundamental sense of justice and fair play that we share as a core American value, as well as the fact that the majority of Americans have not recovered from the "Great Recession."

All of this brings us to Washington and what happens during the 2015 legislative session. The election battles were hard fought and are now over. Those candidates that won should be congratulated, but also recognize they have responsibility to listen to the public, including the majority of registered voters who chose not to vote.

During the 2015 legislative session, legislators will have the opportunity to hear and pass a set of measures — a "Shared Prosperity Agenda" — that would address economic fairness and job creation — issues such as minimum wage, paid safe and sick leave, remedies against wage theft, pay fairness and equity, etc. The public understands these issues, not as partisan issues but as measures that will improve their lives and our economy. I hope that red, blue and purple agree, just like the people of South Dakota, Arkansas and California agree.

(Editor's Note: Jeff Johnson is president of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO.)

Multnomah County workers ratify contract with \$15 minimum wage

Workers at Multnomah County voted resoundingly in favor of ratifying a new three-year contract in ballots cast Nov. 13-14. About 2,900 workers are covered by the agreement between the County and American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 88, which was approved by 94 percent of those casting ballots.

The agreement mostly rolls forward the same terms as the previous contract — with one big exception: A new County minimum wage of \$15 an hour will raise wages for about 160 employees who were making below that amount. That minimum will be phased in, with a \$13 minimum retroactive to July 1, 2014; rising to \$14 on July 1, 2015; and reaching \$15 on July 1, 2016.

For the rest, wages will increase 2.7 percent across the board, retroactive to July 1, 2014. Wages will also rise on July 1, 2015, and July 1, 2016, based on the increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI), with a minimum of 1 percent and a maximum of 4 percent. Local 88's negotiating team, led by Oregon AFSCME representative Bryan Lally, had proposed increases of CPI plus 1 percent — to catch up for years in which members voluntarily gave up any increase in order to help the County and prevent layoffs. But County negotiators made it clear they would not agree to that.

Other key terms are identical to the previous contract: nine paid holidays a year; 2.4 to 5.4 weeks of paid vacation; paid sick leave; seniority rights; a grievance procedure; pension benefits and retiree medical insurance; and employer-provided medical, dental, vision, and drug coverage for employees, spouses and children. Workers have two health insurance options: a Kaiser plan, for which they pay 5 percent of the premium, and a Moda Platinum plan, for which they pay 6.75 percent.

The contract runs through June 30, 2017, but starting January 1, 2016, either side can choose to reopen bargaining on one issue: health coverage.

The County Board of Commissioners is expected to ratify the contract at its next regular meeting, Dec. 4.

Worker activists plan 'Black Friday' protests at Walmart

Walmart workers participated in their boldest action to date Nov. 13 — the first-ever sit-down strike at a Walmart store. They were protesting for an end to retaliation when they speak out for \$15 an hour, full-time hours and respect at work.

The striking workers entered the Crenshaw Walmart in Los Angeles shortly before 10 a.m. and refused to move, holding a sit-in near cash registers. The workers chanted, "Stand Up, Live Better! Sit Down, Live Better!" before placing tape over their mouths signifying the company's attempts to silence workers who are calling for better jobs. After several hours, they left peacefully and headed to another Los Angeles-area store, where they

held a rally. Then workers and their supporters took over the intersection near the Pico Rivera Walmart, refusing to leave until they were arrested and removed from the intersection. Twenty-eight people were arrested, including clergy, community members and strikers.

The Walmart worker activists are planning mass protests at stores nationwide on "Black Friday," the big shopping day immediately after Thanksgiving. In Portland, a protest is scheduled Friday, Nov. 28, from 10 a.m. until noon at the Walmart store at 4200 SE 82nd Ave. For more information, go on line to: <https://actionnetwork.org/events/oregon-walmart-workers-stand-up>.

highest voter turnout percentage-wise in the country.

- Indiana, at 28 percent, had the lowest.

- In California, Texas and New York — the three largest states in terms of population — less than a third of eligible voters voted.

- New York, at 28.8 percent, had the fourth lowest turnout rate in the U.S.

(From Yahoo News)



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Voter turnout for 2014 midterms worst in 72 years

Voter turnout in this year's midterm elections was terrible. How terrible? Just 36.3 percent of eligible voters cast votes — the worst turnout in 72 years, the New York Times reports. Only the 1942 election (33.9 percent) had a lower rate of voter turnout.

Here's a breakdown of nationwide eligible voter turnout, based on preliminary estimates of voting data from the United States Elections Project:

- Less than half of the eligible voters in 43 states cast votes.

- The seven that saw more than half: Oregon, Maine, Wisconsin, Alaska, Colorado, Minnesota and Iowa.

- No state cracked 60 percent.

- Maine, at 59.3 percent, had the