

...Merkley

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There's talk of a Green New Deal. Are you behind it? The Green New Deal is a continuation of the bill I introduced last cycle. It's the concept of driving a transition to 100 percent clean renewable energy, creating millions of good-paying jobs, and seeking to make sure that underserved communities, communities of color, low-income communities benefit from clean energy and from the job creation. And then throw in an element of just transition for people in the fossil fuel world. Our coal miners, at great cost to their own personal health, have provided the energy to drive our country for generations. They should be able to be at the front of the line for jobs in the renewable energy world. We should get as many of those jobs into existing communities as possible. I like the name "Green New Deal" because it emphasizes job creation. We're talking about an investment that might approach a trillion dollars a year for 10 years.

You came out against the Jordan Cove project. Why? I had a very close consultation with our labor union leaders here and nationally about it. We've come to realize that natural gas is a huge contributor to climate chaos. At the point of burning it's much cleaner than coal, and uses less carbon for a given amount of energy. But it leaks a tremendous amount of

methane gas in the pipeline system and thus is no better than coal in general. And we are seeing such a vast change quickly in the impact of carbon dioxide and methane on our climate. We see it here in Oregon in multitudinous ways. We have to artificially change the chemistry of our seawater for our oysters. We are experiencing lower average snowpacks that affect our winter sports and our irrigation water and the health of our trout and salmon streams. We have more aggressive pine beetle infestations because the pine beetles aren't killed by a cold enough winter. And the biggest factor we see is forest fires. The longer, drier, hotter summers in combination with more lightning strikes is the main culprit. Most of these things were theoretical 15 years ago, and we see them in reality today. ... So I reached the conclusion that we have so much infrastructure work to do ... let's build things that build a better world for our children and our children's children, not fossil fuel infrastructure that will do deep damage to our children and our children's children. It's the toughest decision and conversation I've ever gone through. I come from a small town, Myrtle Creek, and then Roseburg, and I think about a coastal community that lost a lot of its timber mills. I mean, we're shipping raw logs out of there to China which just irritates the hell out of me. And I've worked a lot on

Coos Bay infrastructure, helping to save a railroad, and other efforts to support their economy. So that was a very very tough decision.

You've called NAFTA a disaster for American workers. Why? Well we've watched trucks that were built here go to Mexico. We've watched Oreos that were baked here go to Mexico. I've talked to Freightliner workers who had to go down and train their replacements in Mexico. And they felt enormously guilty about it. But they had mortgages to pay and it gave them six months more work, and somebody was going to do it. But if you give full access to our market for products that are built under a different set of rules - low environmental rules, low labor rules, lower wages, then the factory is going to move. And manufacturing is a huge part of middle class America.

What do you think of Trump's NAFTA 2.0? There's nothing in that that would have stopped a company going to Mexico. It has little tiny improvements on auto parts and dairy. That's about it.

Are you running for president? I'm still exploring.

You were the only Senator to endorse Bernie Sanders. Is your decision based on whether he decides to run? No, I'm trying to evaluate the whole complexity of that journey. There are big issues that keep me awake at night. One is the deep corruption of our Con-

stitutional government. And by that I mean gerrymandering and voter suppression and dark money. They're being used by the privileged and powerful to produce government not by and for the people but by and for the powerful. We see that with the tax bill that raided the treasury for \$2 trillion and gave it to the wealthiest people in America, the biggest companies. The second is the foundations for thriving families — housing, health care, education, living wage jobs — are being deeply neglected or damaged. There's just no substitute for a good paying job. I live in a blue collar neighborhood, the same neighborhood I was in from third grade through high school. And there's fewer electives in my high school today. The classes are more crowded. Folks who used to be able to afford to buy a house on working wages can't. Families are now saying, "Well, the only way we'll own a house is to inherit one." Families are not sure they should encourage their kids to pursue higher education. There aren't as many pathways for apprentices. We don't have shop classes to the same degree that we had them. There's so much we have to do to invest in early childhood education, to invest in career and technical education, and create the multiple pathways into the working world. So that's the second big area, investment in families. The third is climate caps, carbon pollu-

tion. You can't undo the carbon in the environment. We've accelerated. When I was born we were in the vicinity of 312 parts per billion. Now we're approximately 100 parts higher, so about a 30 percent increase in carbon in the atmosphere. That's a massive change in the chemistry of the planet in a single generation. And the rate is increasing. When I was born it was going up one point every two to three years. Now it's going up two to three points a year.

You've laid out these three issue areas. Are these the themes of your presidential campaign then? Those are the three things I've talked about everywhere in the country I've gone this last year. Those are the mega issues where we're vastly off track.

What is your decision making process? What would make you want to run or not? I am not in the luxury of being outside my Senate cycle. So I have my senate campaign cycle to weigh against a presidential campaign. The question is: Where can I be most effective in influencing these issues? It comes down to that. I'm the only senator thinking about the race who couldn't be on the ballot for both.

MORE ONLINE Our conversation was much longer than we had room for in print. We talked about Medicare for All, taxing the rich, saving troubled union pensions, and much more. See it all at nwlaborpress.org/JeffMerkley



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St. Charles nurses present a signed petition calling for a fair contract.

Nurses ratify contract at St. Charles in Bend

Nine hundred nurses at St. Charles Medical Center in Bend have a new four-and-a-half-year contract following a 98 percent vote by 664 members of Oregon Nurses Association (ONA). The agreement provides for across-the-board wage increases of 1 to 2 percent every six months, totaling 11.5 percent as of July 1, 2022. The agreement runs through Dec. 31, 2022. Nurses agreed to pay an additional 5 percent of the cost of health pre-

miums in 2021, bringing the total to 10 to 15 percent. Other changes include:

- New hires will come in at a step pay level consistent with their years of experience.
- Nurses will have greater input into staffing and practice issues: Half the members of all hospital shared governance committee will now be nurses.

The hospital is the flagship in the non-profit St. Charles Health System, which also operates facilities in Redmond, Prineville, and Madras. At the Redmond and Prineville facilities, nurses are also represented by ONA; their contracts expire next year.