

Life After Measure 30?

Time to go on the offensive.

So I was smart enough last time not to predict the outcome of the Iowa caucuses.

On the outcome of Measure 30, my heart and my head are split. The smart money in Vegas says no way this thing passes – voters haven't approved an income tax measure in Oregon since the Model T era.

Yet I am hopeful enough to think the voters of Oregon might come around and vote yes for schools. But I am *not* betting on it.

Whatever happens with Measure 30 on Feb. 3, I can predict this: The state will still be in an extreme fiscal and public education crisis with no solutions in sight.

It doesn't have to be that way.

For too long, Democrats and progressives in this state have been playing defense. With the exception of the 1996 Minimum Wage campaign (which won, thank you Joy Marshall), when was the last time we were pushing for real resources to end up in the pockets of working Oregonians? Instead, we bid low, ask for little, confuse voters with complicated process reforms, get nothing, and then spend most of our time fighting outrageous proposals from the radical right that voters understand. We worry about being responsible and realistic, while the right cranks out one shameless proposal after another. How about we stop this sad song?

I think I can name a different tune in three notes.

Bid Big: A Bond Measure For Us. Remember when Gov. Kitzhaber bailed at the last minute in 1990 on a major education initiative? We've been in a defensive crouch ever since. How about running a massive bond measure that inspires Oregon to lead not the race to the bottom but to reach for the top. Imagine a billion dollars of investment (or more) in community college workforce training grants, youth apprenticeship programs, green manufacturing tax credits and other common-sense business and education investments. Let the right wing complain about why this isn't smart – and let Oregon voters and businesses see their economic future in our ideas.

Get a New Governor. Seriously, do we have one now? Ted Kulongoski is literally missing in action. By choice. At a time of crisis, he keeps calling for the progressive grassroots to rise up and tell him what to do, and I think the answer is now quite simple: Start polishing your resume. You've abdicated the mantle of leadership in 2004 and ignored the call to ambitiously make the case for public education, investment and Oregon's greatness. Ted's strategy of keeping his powder dry until 2006 has been all about one thing – his re-election. Well, as they say, he who hesitates is lost. And the Incredible Missing Governor is off the grid in my humble opinion.

Can You Say "Moderate Republicans?" Don't freak out on me but there is NO WAY we will ever get a sustained progressive agenda on the board, anytime this decade, with just the Democrats leading the charge. So I think we should be open to a pro-public education, pro-investment, pro-land use law, progressive Republican gubernatorial candidate in 2006. Think about it: The Republicans in the state legislature come in one flavor right now: very, very right wing. Imagine if they had a few moderate buddies up there in Salem to muddy their waters or better yet, a Republican Governor who wouldn't go along with every crazy proposal and had some undeniable, mainstream credentials. The fact is that a political terrarium that hosts a few healthy moderate Republicans poses a bigger problem for their agenda getting passed and would help our cause immensely in the next 10 years. So let's keep an open mind – while we keep an eye out for the new Tom McCall.

In the meantime, it's fingers crossed on Measure 30. Oregon has always been a leader – and right now we're leading the nation in defining a new vision of a la carte government. People think they can pick and choose what they will pay for – be it schools or sidewalks. Progressives know it's not that simple. But reversing this mess – and the misconceptions – is going to take a creative and ambitious vision of our common heritage and our common future. That's a prediction I'll be banking on.

Dan Carol is a Democratic political strategist and a founding partner of CTSG (www.ctsg.com), a progressive consulting firm based in Eugene and Washington, D.C.



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