

Politics is a lot like sports: Your team is either on offense or defense. House Democrats have been on defense since 2010. In the aftermath of the recent election, Rep. Peter DeFazio is ready to help take his team to the end zone — and, hopefully, to recruit more players to the Democrat team in 2020.

He feels it's urgent to put forth some legislation for the next two years to prove to voters the Democratic Party is the right team to support. The country is facing the two-minute warning, according to the scientific report released by the White House on Nov. 23, which said climate change will have a huge impact on the economy, health and environment.

And the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report says the world has 12 years to curb greenhouse gases or face a significant risk of drought, floods and poverty for many people.

For the next two years with a Democratic Party controlled House of Representatives, DeFazio has his sights set on putting forth legislation to rebuild the country, working to prepare for climate change and investing in young voters through the Young Democrats of Lane County.

Legislate This!

DeFazio isn't afraid to say what he's thinking. In fact, he's the only politician I've ever seen raise a middle finger. It was pointed at the policies of Wildlife Services, a program housed under the Department of Agriculture that kills predators for the livestock industry — at a Cascadia Wildlands event in August 2018.

The Blue Wave in November was a big deal, DeFazio says. After the Republican Party took over statehouses throughout the U.S. and took seats in the House of Representatives and Senate in 2010, DeFazio says they gerrymandered districts in a way that made it impossible for Democrats to recapture a majority in the House.

But Democrats took over anyway, thanks to a massive turnout and on-the-ground organizational efforts by local Democratic Party chapters, he adds.

"This was the most important election in a very long time to get some check on [President Donald] Trump," he says.

Yet DeFazio says the Democrats should've grabbed far more seats — about 270 rather than 234. Republican-controlled gerrymandering prevented a larger Democratic takeover.

A Republican-controlled district doesn't mean that it's impossible to get elected to office as a Democrat. Ben McAdams, former mayor of Salt Lake City, defeated the Republican incumbent. McAdams, however, ran on a campaign of being a more moderate, pro-life candidate.

Yet McAdams won in a district in which, DeFazio says, Republicans outnumber Democrats three-to-one.

The next House session will include liberal and conservative Democrats, but they're all still Democrats, he says.

"We'll find lots of areas of common agreement, then we'll have some of disagreement but far fewer than I'd have with a Republican," he says.

This leads to the question of who will take the gavel as speaker of the House. DeFazio remains mum on the subject and on whether he'd support Rep. Nancy Pelosi, saying this is an internal discussion between Democrats.

"It's healthy [discussion]. It's like sitting down over Thanksgiving and trying to hash things out about family disagreements."

One of Trump's favorite things to do on Twitter is to label Democrats as obstructionists. With a Democrat-controlled House and Republicans controlling the Senate and presidency, it could give some more weight to Trump's accusations if Democrats use the House to block anything the Senate and presidency want.

Not according to DeFazio, though.

"We're not going to be obstructionists," he says. "We'll offer solutions to problems that American people are concerned about."

He says Democrats will be introducing legislation that polls show a large amount voters support. This includes investing in schools, broadband connectivity and infrastructure.

He adds that there are some issues Republicans will oppose on ideology, such as Medicare For All.

DeFazio says Democrats will look into lowering the costs of pharmaceutical drugs. Trump, he says, hasn't delivered on his promise of lowering drug prices. In 2017,

DeFazio went ahead and introduced legislation that would have repealed the prohibition on the federal government's ability to negotiate Medicare Part D drug prices — but he tells me it was a tongue-in-cheek bill.

"Trump is a self-proclaimed master negotiator," DeFazio said in a press release announcing the legislation's introduction. "My bill will require President Trump to keep his promises and apply his celebrated deal-making skills to this issue."

A Democratic majority also means that DeFazio will find himself the chair of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

Under his leadership, one of many things on his to-do list is a reauthorization of the Clean Water Act.

He says the Republicans tried to turn it to the "Dirty Water Act," but Democrats were able to stop that legislation.

"There are new threats to our water that weren't anticipated when the act was passed," he says. "Now we have subtle threats to water in terms of pollution from runoff from agriculture."

In addition, he says, the U.S. needs to begin building resilient infrastructure for climate change, something he says he'd only have partial jurisdiction over.

"Even if we take the strongest steps possible, we're going to have climate change, and we'll have to rebuild our infrastructure both in a way that is green and resilient."

Climate Change Is Real

Cars were honking in support of demonstrators holding signs urging immediate climate action. Someone's car stereo was blasting The Rolling Stones' "Sympathy for the Devil," resulting in the song's "woo woo" chants and samba beat echoing throughout the city block.

More than 40 demonstrators, dressed warmly for a winter day, protested outside of DeFazio's office at the Wayne L. Morse Federal Courthouse in Eugene on Nov. 20.

They urged DeFazio to support the Green New Deal, a climate policy that some incoming Democrats — such as Rep.-elect Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez — have been pushing to shift the U.S. off of fossil fuel consumption.

The demonstration was motivated by a day of action from the Sunrise Movement, an organization of young people united to stop climate change: the Climate Justice League, Cascadia Action Network and other groups.

It was intended to follow Ocasio-Cortez's sit-in demonstration a week earlier in Pelosi's office to demand a select committee to develop a plan for the Green New Deal and that no members on the committee receive contributions from the fossil fuel industry.

"We need radical action on climate change this late in the game," says Tia Hatton, one of the plaintiffs in *Juliana vs. U.S.*, who attended the rally. "He says it isn't realistic, but I think it's more unrealistic for him to expect that we're not going to act on climate change and that the young people are just going to stare at it and do nothing when it's our future on the line."

About 15 minutes after the demonstration started, DeFazio's office posted on Facebook that he has long believed that "climate change is the most concerning issue of our time."

During the demonstration, however, demonstrators mentioned an article on *Politico*, an online news website, that quoted DeFazio saying that it is technologically impossible to not be consuming fossil fuels in five or 10 years.

"It's irritating to be questioned because of one distorted story," he says. "To say I don't get it because of one poorly written or tailored article in the *Politico* rag with a photo with me from a press conference from nine months ago with a headline that doesn't apply to me."

He adds: "I did that interview. I said it was up to the leader. If we need to set up a committee — great. Otherwise we'll work through the existing committees."

After the demonstration, which ended when DeFazio sent out the Facebook post and when demonstrators found out passing through the courthouse's security would take a lot of time, organizers sent out a press release that, in boldface, pointed out DeFazio's post did not declare any commitment to the Green New Deal.

In a statement, DeFazio said he would "support any committee that would implement bold new ideas to address the threat of climate change head-on."

DeFazio tells *Eugene Weekly* that he's "on board" to support whatever the concept of the Green New Deal is, but there isn't any legislation with that title. He goes on to say that the federal government needs to make massive investments in renewable energy first because the

technology that would replace fossil fuels doesn't exist.

"We don't have batteries to store the electricity adequately. We need fuel cells that work," he adds. "Part of any Green New Deal needs to be a massive investment in infrastructure — get people more transit options."

The Future is Youth

In 2016, DeFazio hosted an election watch party at Whirled Pies. Television screens provided the only light inside the otherwise dark room. People were crammed together, watching as cable news outlets were announcing state-by-state, Trump was nearing an Electoral College victory.

It was a devastating night that led DeFazio to try to assure attendees that life would go on and that he'd fight Trump legislatively.

That wasn't the only event DeFazio says he'd held there. He also hosted a watch party when Oregon played Ohio State in the National Championships in 2015, which Oregon lost 42-20.

Sure, he says he loves Whirled Pies' food and beer, but he felt a little superstitious and decided to host the 2018 midterm election watch party at Valley River Inn. The location move wasn't just because of superstition but also due to a larger group that wanted to attend the event.

"It's a good thing the fire marshal wasn't there," he jokes about the big turnout.

During the event, DeFazio made an announcement after Oregon's election results came in. He was so impressed with the high school-aged volunteers who made up the Young Democrats of Lane County that he would match donations from the community to finance an office for the club.

DeFazio first came across the group when Connor Gabor, a South Eugene High School student, started volunteering for DeFazio. Gabor says he started off as an intern and then worked as part of his field staff.

Young Democrats of Lane County began as a school club at South Eugene High School and grew to include other area high schools during the general election. The group's biggest effort was to canvass for Gov. Kate Brown.

"We thought she had a chance of losing," Gabor says.

Two days before the election, Gabor, the Young Democrats' chairman, says DeFazio's campaign manager Carly Gabrielson told him to check his email.

He thought it would be work-related but it turned out to be something bigger: a fundraiser to finance an office space for the Young Democrats.

"I was in shock," he says. "I had no idea he would do that."

Gabrielson says the fundraising campaign is still active to bring in \$10,000 for the club. As of press time, the fundraising has generated \$9,112.80 from 90 donors for the Young Democrats, Gabrielson says.

With DeFazio's promise to match donations dollar-for-dollar, Gabor and other organization members have not needed to fundraise for the organization. Fundraising would've affected the organization's efforts to start lobbying for the upcoming state legislative session in January, he says.

"We basically have a bunch of chairs, talk about policy. It's a cozy place for young Democrats to do homework," he says.

Young Democrats of Lane County now have an office in Eugene Mindworks, a professional co-working space near Fifth Street Market, Gabor says.

The club has formed four caucuses for students to focus on: women's caucus, health care caucus, inclusion caucus and criminal justice caucus. The group plans to introduce something to the Oregon Legislature next legislative session.

"We need more young people involved. One of the problems in elections in this country has been a lack of involvement of younger voters," DeFazio says. "They have a different agenda than those of seniors. We had a senior generation that was very progressive — that was the generation of FDR."

He adds that the senior generation today votes more conservative — and in very high numbers. With more youth enthusiasm and votes, it can counterbalance the more-consistent conservative vote.

With DeFazio's re-election in November, he'll be serving for a 17th term in Congress. DeFazio doesn't want to say that he'll be running again, but he says that he doesn't plan on quitting politics until the U.S. gets rid of Trump, the Democrats take the Senate and Oregon gets a sixth congressional district seat, as well as gets its districts redrawn.

It sounds like DeFazio might have more commuting time to Washington, D.C., in his future. ■