



Photo by Adam Schultz / Biden for President

WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS

By opposing TARP, DeFazio says he was a “pariah” of the party. But years later, he says Rep. Nancy Pelosi told him he was right to oppose it, and if the party had listened to DeFazio, they might not have lost the House. Before Summers got involved and added the “tax cuts too small to notice” to TARP, he says, the bill had money for real infrastructure jobs. This time around, Democrats have to invest in Americans, he says.

“We need to act quickly and show the Americans that there are real results that will not be trickle-down economics or a pittance in everybody’s pockets,” he says, “but actual employment opportunities with real wages and benefits for millions of Americans who have lost their jobs, whose jobs aren’t coming back, living in depressed areas.”

And infrastructure is a key part of that plan, he adds.

Based on his campaign promises, Trump treated infrastructure like a siren song during his presidential campaigns and term. He frequently talked about how he wanted to invest in infrastructure, but as leader of the Republican Party, he never demonstrated any interest in pushing anything through a Republican-controlled Congress. In fact, national news outlets such as *Los An-*

geles Times reported that Trump stormed out of a May 2019 meeting on infrastructure with Democratic Party members of Congress because of House investigations over whether he had blackmailed Ukraine leaders, which resulted in his first impeachment.

On July 1, 2020, the House passed DeFazio’s infrastructure bill, called The Moving Forward Bill, but then Sen. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell never introduced it to the Senate. If passed, it would have invested \$1.2 trillion into the U.S. economy, putting money in areas such as zero-emission buses, affordable housing, renewable energy — and more.

Six months later, DeFazio has that bill ready for re-introduction to the House. He says officials with Biden’s team have seen the bill and so has Pete Buttigieg, Biden’s pick for secretary of transportation. “They are familiar with the bill I moved through the House last year, which was a massive investment that would have created millions of jobs while also taking very aggressive steps against climate change and fossil fuel pollution from transportation, which is the largest emitting factor,” DeFazio says. “I’m certainly open to enhancing or adding provisions to my legislation, but they indicate they think it’s a very good starting point.”

Based on Biden’s Jan. 14 speech, the first legislation that Biden wants Congress to pass is a COVID-19 relief bill. DeFazio says he’ll be involved with certain aspects of that legislation related to “transit, rail, aviation, ports, airports and other entities that are suffering revenue losses and massive layoffs.” After that, DeFazio says the next legislation would be a recovery package along the lines of The Moving Forward Act.

The legislation doesn’t just create work for the construction industry but also engineering, design and manufacturing jobs, the congressman says. And the transportation committee has the strongest “buy America” provision in all of government.

Many Trump voters in 2020 were persuaded to vote for him because of the economy, according to exit polls from *The Washington Post*. If Democrats can demonstrate they can create jobs, DeFazio says “a lot of those people fall off his bandwagon.”

By scattering federal investments in economically depressed areas throughout the U.S., such as rural parts of Oregon, and if the Democrats move fast enough, the Moving Forward Act could change the Democratic Party’s image for some of those 74 million people who voted for Trump in 2020 out of anger for being left out of economic policies of Congress and past presidential administrations. “They’re not white supremacist fascists who invaded the Capitol, they’re just people who are desperate,” DeFazio says.

But if the Democrats in Congress had the political capital to only pass one piece of legislation, DeFazio says it has to be H.R. 1, which would address voting rights in the U.S. He says it would help mitigate the Republican Party’s advantage in future elections.

According to the bill’s language from its 2019 introduction, it addresses voters’ rights, such as voter registration, voting access and limits removing voters from voter rolls; regulate campaign spending, including expanding a ban on foreign money in elections; and require presidential candidates and their running mates to submit up to 10 years of tax returns (which is clearly influenced by Trump’s refusal to share his).

WYDEN IN THE SENATE SEAT

DeFazio isn’t the only Oregon politician to have a committee chair in D.C. Sen. Ron Wyden will serve as chair of the Senate Finance Committee now that the Democratic Party has 50 seats and a vice president to break the tie. The finance committee has oversight on taxation and revenue issues. “It’s the most sought after committee in the Senate,” Wyden tells *Eugene Weekly*.

Over the next two years, Democrats in the Senate will have to juggle Trump’s trial, new legislation and Republicans who will try to get in the way of policymaking. But Wyden says he is optimistic about the new leadership in the White House: “After the past four years, I’m eager for this fresh start and a new day.” Like DeFazio, Wyden

says it’s important that the party has learned its lesson from 2009 — because you can’t hope to have a second chance at running Congress. “Congress in ’09 didn’t pass another economic relief package after the recovery act, and Democrats lost control in 2010,” he says. “You’d better not take your foot off the gas in the middle of economic recovery.”

Wyden says he’s proposing triggers that tie unemployment benefits to economic conditions on the ground. “We saw the need for that in December,” he says. “We had millions of families at risk of losing all their income the day after Christmas because Mitch McConnell was blocking an extension — that’s no way to run a country.”

Wyden says he’s spent some time with Biden’s pick for secretary of the treasury, Janet Yellen, whom Obama nominated to serve as chair of the Federal Reserve over Summers after pressure from liberal Democrats in 2013. “I think we’re very much on the same wavelength of those issues,” he adds.

As chair of the finance committee, he says he wants to ensure every American pays their taxes, including the very wealthy. He points to the disparity between working Americans like nurses on the COVID-19 front line and the billionaires who can defer their taxes “to the point where they pay hardly anything at all.”

And he says he wants to throw all 44 fossil fuel tax breaks away. In their place, he wants to have tax breaks for clean energy, clean transportation fuel and energy efficiency. “We’ll get more green for less green,” he adds.

‘I played basketball in college. I can dribble with both hands and you can focus on the economic reform agenda and ensuring there’s accountability.’

— RON WYDEN, U.S. SENATOR

Wyden says working in a Senate that’s split 50-50 means he’ll have to work across the aisle like he did when pushing for the additional \$600 in unemployment per week in the CARES Act. “I was able to get the Trump administration — not the Republican senators — to go along, and we built a coalition so we couldn’t be stopped on the Senate floor,” he says. “The unemployment expansion that brought more than \$2 billion to Oregon and helped thousands of Oregonians make rent and pay groceries actually lowered the poverty rate in America. I stayed with it until we had enough support to get it passed.”

And Wyden will push for another round of \$600 unemployment checks in an upcoming COVID relief bill.

In addition to economic relief legislation, Democrats also have to deal with Trump’s trial whenever the House decides to deliver the impeachment papers to the upper chamber of Congress. Wyden says although McConnell has signaled he approved of Trump’s recent impeachment, he’s also given mixed signals on it. But Wyden says the Senate can do both economic recovery and deal with Trump’s trial at the same time. “I played basketball in college. I can dribble with both hands and you can focus on the economic reform agenda and ensuring there’s accountability,” he says.