

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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Founded October 16, 1875

## OUR VIEW

# Wooing the purple voter

As is true across the state, Eastern Oregon is home to a sizable bloc of nonaffiliated voters.

In fact, if gathered into a unified group, these voters would make up the second largest party in the state after Democrats. They would be the second largest party in Eastern Oregon after Republicans.

It doesn't take a political scientist to figure out how this came to be. Since the Motor Voter law began in January 2016, hundreds of thousands of people have been automatically registered as voters after receiving or renewing a driver's license. Unless they specify at that time they'd like to register with a particular party, they're marked non-affiliated, as more than 330,000 people have since December of 2015.

It also doesn't take much political savvy to understand the potential of unleashing the power of these voters (32 percent of the voters in the state, just behind the Democrats' 35 percent) in the primaries, where for now they are mostly stuck on the sidelines.

One idea to get them off the bench is Senate Bill 225, crafted by Secretary of State Dennis Richardson, a Republican, and Alan Zundel, who in 2016 ran against Richardson as the Pacific Green Party candidate. It would allow candidates to run as non-



Staff photo by E.J. Harris, File  
**Marin Kennedy, a senior at Pendleton High School shown in this 2017 file photo, talks about how her generation of voters are not fans of the current party labels.**

affiliated, with the nearly 900,000 voters selecting a candidate to go on the November ballot.

We applaud the attempt to bring these voters into the democratic fold. Increasing the number of voters in Oregon has been a top priority, and getting them engaged in the democratic process is the next step.

However, we would urge caution as to whether SB 225 is the best step forward.

The very nature of how a voter comes to be nonaffiliated lends per-

spective as to why this bill may not work as well as its proponents hope.

The bill attempts to corral a bloc of voters who either don't want or have chose not to identify with any ideological restraints. By creating a non-affiliated primary, the bill is pushing this group toward the establishment of a "single-voice" which takes compromise and a majority-minority dynamic. Essentially, it limits a bloc of voters with restraints when the thing that drives them is the resistance to restraints in the first place.

Nonaffiliated is a default position. It means the voter is either not swayed by any party platform, or not interested enough to select one. Their vote is as good as their neighbor's in the general election, but they don't have a significant hand in deciding who gets there.

As easy as it is to paint the state in red and blue, on a personal level most of us are some shade of purple. Very few, we would wager, buy 100 percent into their party of choice, and especially not into every person elected to represent the party.

The good news is, Oregon is a good state in which to be purple, especially when it comes to voting. Switching political parties is a piece of cake. Go on the Secretary of State's website, log-in with your driver's license and select which party you'd like to join. There are no dues, no meetings, no papers to sign. A nonaffiliated voter can effectively play the part of free agent, paying attention to primary campaigns and deciding which race they'd like to be heard in.

We're not so worried about the major parties losing their influence, or a "nonaffiliated" candidate shaking up a general election. The red vs. blue dynamic could use a bit of a shuffle.

But we'd rather see it in the form of a more organically engaged voting public.

## OTHER VIEWS

# One cheer for the Green New Deal

The first major policy intervention from Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the noted social-media personality and future dictator-for-life of the Americas (I believe she's also a congresswoman of some sort), is a quite-extraordinary document: a blueprint for fighting climate change that manages to confirm every conservative critique of liberal environmental activism, every Republican suspicion of what global-warming alarm is really all about.

The core conservative suspicion is that when liberals talk about the dire threat of global warming, they're actually seizing opportunistically on the issue to justify, well, #fullsocialism — the seizure of the economy's commanding heights in order to implement the most left-wing possible agenda.

A conventional liberal, up until now, would dismiss that belief as simply paranoid, the product of Fox News feedback loops and the science-denying fever swamps. But the Green New Deal that Ocasio-Cortez and Massachusetts Sen. Edward Markey are sponsoring — and that four leading Democratic contenders for the presidency have already endorsed — responds by saying: Yes, that's absolutely correct.

It isn't just that the Green New Deal proposes a 10-year plan for decarbonizing the U.S. economy that would involve the kind of "war socialism" unseen since, well, World War II (a model the authors explicitly evoke). It isn't just that it dismisses all worries about deficits or inflation with a

Venezuelan insouciance, or that it seems lukewarm about any policy or technology that might be tainted by capitalism or disliked by progressive interest groups.

It's also that the list of proposed policies for fighting climate change is filled with what even David Roberts of Vox, in the course of praising the Green New Deal, admits are "eyebrow-raising doozies," with everything from universal health care to a job guarantee draped under the mantle of environmentalism. And that's just in the official language of the (nonbinding, it should be noted) resolution: The Frequently Asked Questions that temporarily accompanied the New Deal's rollout is even more striking in its green just means everything progressives want ambition.

So there's a pretty easy story to tell here about why, if the Democratic Party makes the Green New Deal vision its own, that shift will empower climate-change skeptics, weaken the hand of would-be compromisers in the GOP and put the kind of climate-change package that could win at least 51 votes in the Senate even further out of reach. And also possibly help Donald Trump win re-election.

But let me temper this critique by finding two positive things to say about the Green New Deal, which between them will add up to the single cheer promised in this op-ed's title.

First, in moving somewhat away from the long-standing centrist emphasis on pricing carbon — via carbon taxes or a cap-and-trade system — toward a focus on direct spending, the left might be moving away from theoretical efficiency toward political feasibility.

The experience of the developed world is that carbon pricing



schemes look really good in theory, but tend to either get compromised toward inefficiency in practice or else inspire populist uprisings like the gilets jaunes in France. And buried inside the sweeping command-and-control vision of the Green New Deal is the material for a more modest alternative: basically, an emphasis on research and resilience, which would spend more money on basic science, alternative-energy adaptations and mitigation in the communities most likely to be affected by storms and tides and heat.

This would point to a different zone of compromise from the one often debated up till now. Instead of centrist elites compromising to raise energy taxes that often fall heavily on the working class, you could imagine left-populists

and right-populists compromising on adaptationist public works, on "big, beautiful" infrastructure projects (to borrow our president's rhetoric) that don't pretend to solve climate change but do mitigate its consequences.

If the sweeping ambition of the Green New Deal leads to positive incremental change, I think that's the most likely way it happens. But then I also want to mildly praise the resolution's anti-incrementalism — because there are virtues in trying to offer not just a technical blueprint but a comprehensive vision of the good society, and virtues as well in insisting that dramatic change is still possible in America, that grand projects and scientific breakthroughs are still within our reach.

They might not be, since the

United States is presently decadent — with a stalemated politics, an aging and risk-averse population, a balkanized culture — in ways that may limit our ability to re-create the specific projects of the past and preclude a regained conception of the common good.

But the desire not to be a decadent society is a healthy one, and in that sense the Green New Deal deserves credit for looking at the American past and saying, in effect: Why not us, again?

So that's my faint praise. Enough, I hope, to earn my energy-efficient cabin an extra solar panel, bestowed by the beneficence of First Citizen AOC, in the utopia to come.

Ross Douthat is a columnist for the New York Times.

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