

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

VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

or renewing a driver's license. Unless they specify at that time that they'd like to register with a particular party, they're marked nonaffiliated, 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 nonaffiliated, 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 perspective 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 chosen 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.

Credit where its due: Cheers to the Wallowa Memorial Hospital

Wallowa County's own Wallowa Memorial Hospital and its staff

have been diligent these past several years under the sound leadership and guiding hand of Chief Executive Officer Larry Davy.

And it's paying off. The apparent effort has culminated in a host of national awards and honors as well as a round of applause from the Wallowa County Chieftain's editorial board.

As we reported last month, in 2018 the hospital demonstrated a functional level of financial security both by making more money and growing profits while simultaneously offering more services to individuals who otherwise might not be able to afford to pay for the services they've received. Even more impressive for Wallowa County's largest employer, which offers an average pay rate higher than that of Wallowa County's median income, is that these accomplishments came during a tumultuous time as rural American hospitals face new increasing challenges.

As Davy himself pointed out, just under 50 percent of the remaining 1,300 rural hospitals are struggling financially at least to some extent. Yet Davy's emphasis on the importance of financial sustainability as it relates to continued quality of service has been remarkably effective. Just four years before Wallowa Memorial Hospital's profitable 2018 year, the construction debt for the roughly 10 year old building stood at about

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\$19 million, and now sits as low as \$11 million.

The ambitious goals for Wallowa Memorial Hospital and its leadership to be at the cutting edge of rural and community healthcare has been well received

BEYOND ITS IMPRESSIVE AND ESTABLISHED PROGRESS TOWARDS A SOUND INFRASTRUCTURE OF FINANCIAL STABILITY AND OUTSTANDING MEDICAL CARE, WALLOWA MEMORIAL WORKS DIRECTLY TO STRENGTHEN THE FABRIC THROUGHOUT WALLOWA COUNTY, ALL IN ADDITION TO ITS ROLE AS THE COUNTY'S LARGEST EMPLOYER.

by more than a couple different healthcare ranking and analytics institutions it seems. Wallowa Memorial Hospital earned a spot in the top 20 Critical Access Hospitals out of 1,340 nation wide by the National Rural Health Association in both 2017 and 2018. And the hospital has been on iVantage Analytics radar for some time now, earning a spot in its Top 100 Critical Access Hospital ranking list each year between 2013-18.

Wallowa County's sole hospital was further honored by Healthgrades with a Patient Safety Excellence Award, while Woman's Choice Awards credited Wallowa Memorial for its "Overall Patient Experience" for small hospitals across the nation. The

hospital also ranked in the top 20 Most Beautiful Small Hospitals.

Frankly, each and any of these honors should make Wallowa County proud of its local hospital, particularly while it stands on its own feet without the security of a larger umbrella network of hospitals. But it's the community focused mission that earns a full

round of applause from the editorial board at the Wallowa County Chieftain.

Beyond its impressive and established progress towards a sound infrastructure of financial stability and outstanding medical care, Wallowa Memorial works directly to strengthen the fabric throughout Wallowa County, all in addition to its role as the county's largest employer.

As of now, the hospital is on track to give away \$1 million in healthcare to those without adequate health insurance or other

means to cover health expenses. Davy expressed the force behind that agenda, saying, "our goal is to make sure no one is turned away." But he also noted that "A million dollars is a lot of money for a small hospital."

As we were reminded by one of our readers just a couple weeks ago, we need to remember that our country is great. We'll expand that sentiment to say our county is great. So we give credit where its due with a round of applause for Wallowa Memorial Hospital and all those who contribute to its success, because its contributions to Wallowa County help make it even greater.

How far ahead do we — can we — see?

It's been almost 60 years since a college professor named Wheelwright suggested that we can all imagine the world as it was prior to our arrival, but cannot easily imagine the world going on after our deaths. He was talking about the origins of political and religious beliefs, and how descriptions of hell are always stronger than those of heaven—we've seen the hellish in our lives, but get fantastical when we try to see paradise. The distant future is too far from our lives.

Mothers and fathers tell us stories about themselves and the world—their worlds especially—before us. Textbooks, parades, sports teams, teachers, coaches, uncles, neighbors and the immediate world we come into is invariably linked to a past full of stories, places, and relatives—some of whom looked like us when they were young!

And the present is all around us, sometimes painful, sometimes good, and at all times part of a bigger world that we understand from growing experience, from seeing and listening and absorbing life as it happens. Our lives seem pregnant in the present with the past and the world around—and in good times ready to burst into the future. Past and present link us to a semi-predictable tomorrow.

Living in chaos, as the children of war in Europe and Asia did in the 1940s, Vietnam did in the 1960s, and Syria and Iraq and Afghanistan do now, must be hell. Yesterday was hell; today is scary; and there might not be a tomorrow. Living in drought, political turmoil, and hunger in Central Africa or Venezuela today shrinks the past and the future to the grains of rice and pieces of bread eaten



MAIN STREET

Rich Wandschneider

or wished for today.

Here, we count our blessings, attribute them to good family, good religion, good country. And we imagine our children in the same or very similar worlds. They'll go to church like we do, school like we did, find jobs like we did (or a little bit better). The jobs will be ones we know and can name: running the ranch, teaching school, practicing medicine or law, welding, plumbing, cutting trees, newspaper reporting or maybe even writing computer programs—whatever that is! How good it is to have a son or daughter stepping over our lead, doing something that didn't exist when we were young, living somewhere exotic that we can visit, working with smart people we want to meet.

We're stretched by an ever-changing present: a generation ago we would not have imagined our daughters running the ranch, doctoring, or driving big trucks, our sons working as nurses or elementary teachers. There is a story in today's New York Times about women as early computer programmers. Bright women had worked breaking codes in WW II. After the war, with law schools and medical schools still largely off limits for women, some found their way—by taking aptitude tests—into early computer work.

The important thing in all this imagining is that we see a future world—not too

distantly—as if we are in it, watching our grandchildren and maybe great-grandchildren carry on lives not too distant from our own.

When those easy visions become difficult, some of us bolt. In less than a generation, the idea that some of our children would be with same-sex partners—imagined I am sure by a small percentage of our fathers and grandmothers, but not by most of us—has become a reality. When a grandchild marries someone of another color or religion—as has always happened but now becomes more frequent, most but not all of us adjust those movies of future lives.

It's like that with weather and climate. We imagine some hot summers and cold winters, the occasional forest fire, flood, or hurricane. Weather seems a series of random but recurring events in our ordered world. Our grandchildren will have the same good years and bad in the same hayfields.

But what if the hayfield stays dry for a decade, as farms and fields in Syria and Iraq have? What if the tide rises above our coastal homes, or swallows the small island, Kiribati, that its citizens call a country?

Futurists, like the writer Ursula LeGuin, can imagine a world without war and one where color and gender matter less, and climate scientists make pictures of land and water 50 and 100 years from now. But it is when 100 years becomes tomorrow, when the fires and floods lap at our doors, when climate becomes weather, when brown grandchildren come to our houses, when the future touches us at one child's remove, that the future becomes real.

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P.O. Box 338 • Enterprise, OR 97828
Office: 209 NW First St., Enterprise, Ore.
Phone: 541-426-4567 • Fax: 541-426-3921

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Publisher, Chris Rush, crush@eomediagroup.com

Reporter, Stephen Tool, steve@wallowa.com

Reporter, Ellen Morris Bishop, ebishop@wallowa.com

Administrative Assistant, Amber Mock, amock@wallowa.com

Advertising Assistant, Cheryl Jenkins, cjenkins@wallowa.com

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