

# All of Oregon's elections should be 'free and equal'

## OTHER VIEWS

Mike Eng



Motor Voter Act, Oregon has stubbornly continued to suppress some voters' "free and equal" participation. Oregon's "closed" primary system only allows voters who are registered as either a Republican or a Democrat, to cast a ballot in primary elections.

No eligible voter in Oregon should be forced to join one of the two major political parties in order to exercise their right to vote.

Oregon's "closed" primary system is the result of the duopoly maintained by the Republican and Democratic parties, which together control Oregon politics. If we, as a state, truly value voter access and participation, we shouldn't leave it to the leadership of the Republican and Democratic parties, whose interests are, by definition, partisan and narrow to open up Oregon's taxpayer-funded primary races.

"I don't care who does the electing, as long as I get to do the nominating," famously declared William "Boss" Tweed, who long

controlled the Democratic Party machine in New York City in the 19th century. Sadly, this quote still applies to how Oregon's primary system is run.

This is why a non-partisan group of Oregonians from across the state have come together to champion a Ballot Initiative Petition to give all voters the opportunity to determine who makes it through primaries to the general election.

Oregon Open Primaries, an all-volunteer nonprofit, is currently collecting signatures for a ballot initiative that would amend Oregon's Constitution to clarify that when it says "all elections shall be free and equal," it means that "the state shall only select candidates for the general election by conducting an open primary election in which all qualified candidates and electors may participate regardless of political party affiliation or nonaffiliation."

Currently, only voters registered as Republicans or Democrats can vote in publicly funded prima-

ries for the state's most important offices, such as for governor, as well as for House and Senate representatives to the U.S. Congress, state legislators and other statewide executive offices, such as secretary of state, attorney general, treasurer and labor commissioner.

And yet, major political parties represent an increasingly smaller share of voters in Oregon. Statewide, the percentage of nonaffiliated voters has surged by 40% in the past five years. Non-affiliated voters now outnumber voters registered as Republicans, and are expected to soon overtake the number of voters registered as Democrats. Astoundingly, in 18 of Oregon's 36 counties — that's half the state's counties, including large and small, red and blue, East side and West side — non-affiliated voters outnumber both Republicans and Democrats.

In Wallowa County, according to the latest numbers available from the Secretary of State's Office, Republicans com-

prise approximately 47% of total registered voters; Democrats are 20%; and nonaffiliated voters are 27%. This means that approximately 1,600 voters in Wallowa County have no voice and are barred from voting in Oregon's primary elections that determine which candidates will be listed on final ballots.

Although the state Republican and Democratic parties blame each other for the hyperpartisanship and polarization that currently characterizes Oregon politics, both parties have long resisted a surefire solution to easing this divisiveness — allow nonaffiliated voters to participate in primaries that determine voters' choices in the general election. Then, candidates would need to listen and respond to the concerns of a much broader group of voters, instead of just to the most partisan and often most extreme members of their base, who generally tend to be the voters in party primaries. Open primaries would encourage more candi-

dates to campaign as true problem-solvers working for the best interests of all Oregonians.

Supporters of the "Free and Equal" Initiative Petition (Initiative Petition 39) are currently gathering signatures to qualify for including the constitutional amendment on the November 2022 ballot, so that voters can decide whether the basic right of voting should extend to all voters, regardless of their party affiliation or nonaffiliation.

To learn more about the "Free and Equal" Initiative Petition, see [www.oregonopenprimaries.org](http://www.oregonopenprimaries.org). You can also print out an "Electronic Signature Sheet" from the website for you to sign and return by mail to Oregon Open Primaries.

Oregon Open Primaries is also actively recruiting volunteers to help gather signatures.

Mike Eng lives in rural Lostine. He's a retired public policy mediator and a volunteer for Oregon Open Primaries. He can be reached at 541-569-2124.

# Don't just babble political rhetoric — think first

## OTHER VIEWS

Connie Dunham



nel should focus on fact. Talk shows should be taken with a grain of salt and the material investigated before we repeat anything as fact. Unfortunately, some of the fact checkers online are not very reliable, either. It takes a discerning eye to unravel the truth, which leads me to the second reason.

People have lost the ability to debate or discuss with logic. I wonder how long it's been since either was taught in our public schools. If you can't think logically, you can't present a case that will convince someone to think your way. Debate teams should be required in high school, and logic should be taught before teens have hormones disrupt their brainwaves. Children should not be fed propaganda, but should be taught to think and examine facts, coming to their own conclusions.

If your real goal is to gather more proponents for your particular issue, I would suggest a few things.

Foremost is to present true facts. If you don't know if something is a fact, then lay it aside. It takes a lot of investigative work to research an issue and really know it. Some issues are very complicated and won't be solved as easily

as we may think. We must be educated on the issues that appear on a ballot! Filling in a dot on your ballot should be based on your educated decision, not simply the party who it is affiliated with.

Second, present solutions to what you perceive is a wrong policy or direction, instead of running down another point of view.

Third, agree with issues that seem to be working, even though those issues may belong to another person or party. Why not? Is not the goal to better our America?

Fourth, speak softly and respectfully. Your objective should not be to anger the other person or put them on the defensive, for then you have defeated your purpose of convincing them you're right.

And last, be ready to rebuke those on your own side who insist on fomenting more distrust, anger and hate by salacious remarks.

Our Founding Fathers found ways to come together, even though there were many heated debates, and came up with a document that has never been equaled, the very document that lets us have these conversations almost 250 years later. I'm pretty sure they

had a good foundation in logic.

Please think before you put something to pen and paper, and remember that a spoken word cannot be taken back into your mouth. Keep it closed if you're not sure it's an accurate and polite response!

Connie Dunham ranches north of Enterprise with her husband. She has lived in Wallowa County since 1974.

Follow us on Facebook!

# IT'S IN YOUR INBOX

before your mailbox

Subscribers can receive daily email updates and uninterrupted digital delivery on a computer, tablet and smartphone free with your subscription.

**Sign up for free digital access**

Wallowa County **CHIEFTAIN** Call 800-781-3214 [wallowa.com/newsletters](http://wallowa.com/newsletters)