DIRECTION from page 1A

Just as we began to question our own work and contemplate dropping the whole inquiry, we received a tip to ask the city a very specific question: "Have city committees been infiltrated by partisan actors?" Once we posed that ques-

tion, all further response from the city regarding that subject began requiring public records requests. At first, we believed it was because of the questions we were asking. But as we began filing official requests for this information, so did threats against the newspaper. Local political leaders and their groups began cancelling subscriptions, claiming that we were actively siding with "the minority voice" within the community and not representing the majority. Interview requests were refused and social media posts became increasingly negative about the paper on certain social media pages — some created specifically for that reason. As our investigation continued through the months ahead, the threats became more hostile and more specific to members of the news staff.

It took more than a year, but we finally came to understand why.

"... political control of everything from dog catcher to governor"

Since 2016, different partisan groups have been jockeying for total control over the Siuslaw regions' various governmental institutions.

"Getting grassroots organization into our local government is a must," one commentator wrote on Facebook in January 2017. "This was the big plan. Start putting people into any type of govt (sic) position and work it until you have political control of everything from dog catcher to governor. That's been something the tea party folks just took advantage of. While we were discussing policy they were quietly taking over local govt."

While a social media comconstrued as an official stateliberal groups were looking to stack local committees to undo policies anticipated from the Trump administration. A few weeks later, local Republican leaders released the following email to a private political group:

"At our last meeting Wayne Lemler (County Repub. chairman), emphasized how important it is for conservatives to start replacing liberals on local boards, etc. There are lots of open slots in the Florence area for you to do this. Although the positions do not declare a party, if you want to move the needle in local politics from liberal to more conservative, you need to get involved (or involved in supporting our candidates). Below is a list of

open positions and the canif you apply, we've got your back!" Given

the na-

ture of

national partisanship, inevitable that na-

tional ideals will seep into local politics. It's important to remember that those involved on both sides are not evil. They are teachers, doctors, philanthropists, business owners, local artisans, community leaders.

They're our neighbors.

There can be positive outcomes to having political parties participate. All forms of government struggle in getting community volunteers to serve on committee seats, from budget to planning. Truth be told, the majority of area residents don't get involved with city government, except in times of controversy. At the very least, political parties can be a factor in motivating individuals to become involved in their local government.

In addition, political parties have done good things for the local community. Thousands of dollars have been raised for area nonprofits by these organizations, some of which have actually found common ground on controversial issues such as climate change and gun con-

Most people don't believe that the issues they advocate for are partisan issues, i.e., climate change is a human issue; immigration enforcement is about the law; gun local government - and rights are about constitutional rights.

However, it is the unique political makeup of the Siuslaw region that makes the strongest argument against what has become a political polarization of the commu-

"According to Lane County Elections, the three precincts making up our Florence and Dunes City areas organizations, they are often ment could in no way be cast their majority of votes aligned with groups that adfor a Republican president, vocate confronting local ofment, it was later confirmed Republican Secretary of ficials over national policies, to us on the record that local State, Republican State Trea- as well as through protests was ever a civil war, there surer and for Kate Brown's opponent, Republican Bud Pierce," one local political leader wrote about a public members make attempts at talk by the governor. "Since the meeting topics leaned to her agenda, it did not represent, nor 'tally' the views, of the Florence majority."

> sides have made to justify a mandate, but the actual 2016 numbers tell a different sto-

> While Trump may have won the majority in Dunes City with 51 percent of the vote, in every other precinct he was below 50 percent. And the claim about Brown is incorrect; she won in the Florence district by more than 100 votes. In fact, Florence is the most liberal

precinct in the region, with didates who have declared so Democrats winning by wide far. I want you to know that margins in some races by upwards of 400 votes.

> "It doesn't matter how we decide. The final decision does matter, but we're never going to get everybody on board. It's not going to happen. We're going to have people disappointed who don't like the direction we're going. And they'll be vocal about it. That's fine, that's their right. There will be people that agree and think we're doing a great job. We hear it all."

> > However, in other regions — particularly the unincorporated precinct — the margins are much tighter, with some races favoring Republicans, such as in the governor's race.

In terms of the Siuslaw region, there is no dominant political majority. In speaking with citizens — both conservative and liberal — most say they value cooperation over ideological purity. Most feel uncomfortable with what they consider extremes influencing decisions, particularly during a time of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet from a partisan political perspective, the precinct map is a godsend.

Flip just a couple hundred votes, and you have control of everything.

"This anger drove millions

While arguments for political parties in local government have certainly been made, it is often with the caveat that "politics does not influence a vote" in nonpartisan elections such as city council and local board po-However, there are local

political groups which have openly stated their intentions to insert politics into their views are far from moderate. On the liberal side, the "resist" movement heavily influences their outlook. A driving factor in their tactics is to both replace and locally counteract Trump's policies through local ordinances. While Siuslaw News has found no evidence to support accusations that they are affiliated with "terrorist" and filling local seats with

Democrats. While many individual bipartisan solutions in public comments, prominent leaders within the group often do not.

"This anger drove millions It's an argument that both of people to march here in Florence and throughout the country and the world," one resident wrote in a letter to the editor. "It is anger that brought these people together. Now we are at the stage of channeling this anger into a meaningful resistance. ... It may take a few years, but through our sustained anger we will take back America."

It is this kind of rhetoric that has painted the group as "dangerous" by some elected

The person who said this has launched a crusade to bring the city's attention climate

change. However, it was difficult some elected officials to reach mon ground on a statement motivated by anger. There were protests,

there were insults against the officials. The actions of this individual, along with other like-minded groups in the community, helped shape the views of elected officials on climate change as a whole. And when that occurred,

the entire climate change argument became a partisan On the conservative side,

the primary local group is

headed by a couple who cut their political teeth in Washington state by creating a political action organization against a school bond within the city, and it appears the efforts were successful. What they found unsuccessful, however, was an

attempt to block Catholic Charities from building low-income housing for local migrant workers who were living in unsanitary conditions due to a lack of housing opportunities. At a council meeting of Prosser City, one of the pair "... presented 160 signed protest cards for the council to review, then turned to Catholic Charities' representatives and blurted out: 'You folks are not welcome here," according to reporting in the Tri-City Herald.

That individual now sits on the City of Florence Community and Economic Development Committee (CEDC) and has worked on updating city housing codes in an effort to foster afford-

able housing in the region. As for statements from some conservative supporters, they range from "Trump was elected fair and square by citizens of the United States. Insurrection will be dealt with because the will of the people through the ballot box will stand," to an individual who stated that if there were people "just chomping at the bits to unleash maximum destruction on all anti-American, Anti-fa-loving anarchists."

When an elected Florence official posted the comments, people suggested he contact the police, as some construed it as a direct threat to the official — so he did.

"My job is to represent the voice of the city, the voice of my constituents," another councilor stated in a private interview with Siuslaw News. "I represent anybody, both sides, every side, of whatever

the conversation might be. I 'Don't confuse me with the get advice from council and staff. And I will move forward with that information in what I feel is the best representation for the city and matter, but we're never going the public."

attempts to bridge the gaps between disparate groups.

As an elected official, it's vital to let the facts lead decisions. But when there is so much division surrounding the facts, and each faction using their own version of facts, it can be difficult to make a sound decision.

In a zero-sum partisan winner and a loser.

facts, I've already made up my mind," they said. "It doesn't matter how we decide. The final decision does to get everybody on board. They were talking about It's not going to happen. We're going to have people disappointed who don't like the direction we're going. And they'll be vocal about it. That's fine, that's their right. There will be people that agree and think we're doing a great job. We hear it all."

In the next Siuslaw News edition on Aug. 15, we will provide a summary of these game, there will always be a effects, beginning in 2016, as part of the overview heading "I think it goes back to, into our investigative series.



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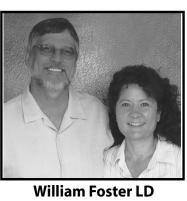
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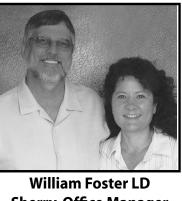
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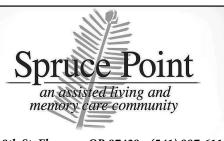
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