

Local & State

Democrats first to top 1 million registered voters in Oregon

By Dick Hughes
For the Oregon Capital Bureau

Before Bernie Sanders halted his presidential campaign, he might have caused a surge in Oregon voters who switched to being Democrats for the state’s May primary election.

New statistics released by the Secretary of State’s Office show the Democratic Party is Oregon’s first political party to top 1 million voters.

Both the Oregon Democratic and Republican parties restrict voting in their primaries to members of their party. Veteran political scientist Jim Moore said it appears that many previously unaffiliated voters changed their registration to Democrat, likely to vote for Sanders, which helped put the Democratic party over the 1 million mark.

“It shows that there is an electorate out there that’s paying attention to politics and will take actions in order to vote as they want to in the primary,” said Moore, a professor at Pacific University.

The lineups for the May 19 primary ballot were set weeks ago. The Democratic presidential candidates are Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, who had ended her campaign before

GOP registrations tops in Baker

The Democratic Party is adding to its advantage in voter registrations statewide, but in Baker County the Republicans continue to hold the numerical advantage.

About 45.3% of the county’s 12,207 voters are registered Republicans. The second-largest contingent is nonaffiliated voters, who make up 31.4% of the electorate.

Democrats rank a distant third at 17%.

BAKER COUNTY REGISTERED VOTERS, APRIL 2020

- Total: 12,207
- Republicans: 5,525 — 45.3%
- Nonaffiliated: 3,837 — 31.4%
- Democrats: 2,072 — 17.0%
- Independent: 603 — 4.9%

Source: Oregon Elections Division

Sanders, and Joe Biden, the presumptive nominee. President Donald Trump is the sole Republican candidate.

As of April, Oregon had 2,862,831 registered voters.

By party, they included:
• Democrats, 1,006,266
• Republicans, 711,344

- Independent, 123,189
- Libertarian, 19,215
- Working Families, 9,128
- Pacific Green, 7,679
- Constitution, 3,682
- other parties, 17,660

But the second-largest group of voters, behind Democrats, comprises the 962,453

voters who chose no party.

Moore said the new data do not represent significant change in the Oregon electorate. The number of unaffiliated voters has been rising for decades at the expense of the major parties.

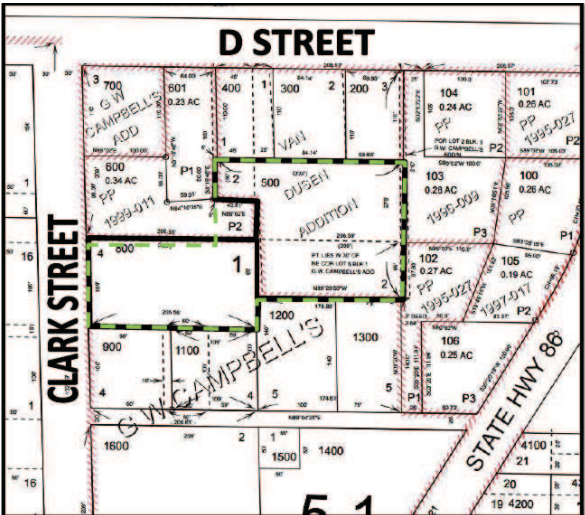
That shift took off in the 1990s but began in the 1970s in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal and President Richard Nixon’s resignation, according to Moore. Instead of seeing political parties as a way to accomplish common goals, voters came to view both major parties as corrupt.

Oregon’s system of automatic “motor voter” registration through the DMV has swelled voter rolls in recent years, especially for unaffiliated voters. Overall registration in Oregon is up 2.85 percent from a year ago. That could mean a large turnout at the November general election, which is open to all voters regardless of party.

“It looks like we’re going to have the possibility once again, as we did in 2018, of a record number of people voting but the percentage of registered voters will be lower simply because there are so many more voters,” Moore said.

about 8,080 residents.

Baker County, with a population of 16,820, has had 87 residents tested for the coronavirus — 86 of those being negative.



The proposed senior housing development, The Carriage Homes, would be built in the block south of D Street and east of Clark Street.

HOUSING

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The Baker City Planning Commission will have a public hearing on the application May 20 at 6:30 p.m. at the Baker County Courthouse, 1995 Third St. A limited number of people can attend the hearing in person, but officials recommend attending by teleconference. To do so, call 1-408-418-9388 (toll-free) and enter the meeting number 967 968 262.

David Hays, owner of Big Creek Rentals LLC and Big Creek Builders Inc. submitted the application on behalf of property owner Russ Hunemiller of Meridian, Idaho.

The Carriage Homes would be accessed by a new private road off Clark Street.

In the application, Hays wrote that the development is intended to “address the rental shortages in Baker City.”

“This project has good access from Clark Street and is a half block from D Street,” Hays wrote. “The property is within walking distance to the Community Center and stores.”

Community Connection’s Senior Center is at 2810 Cedar St., east of the proposed complex.

A copy of the application, maps and other documents, and the criteria the Planning Commission will consider in deciding whether to approve the project are available by calling Tara Micka at 541-523-8219 or by emailing tandrews@bakercounty.org

A Planning Department staff report to the Commission will be available by May 13 and can be obtained by sending an email request.

CONFIRMED

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“I know the public is looking for that information, and I’m sorry there isn’t more that we can provide legally,” Kerns said.

The person who tested positive has been directed to isolate from others for the duration of the illness, which is until they are symptom-free for 72 hours, according to a press release from the Health Department.

The Health Department will employ “contact tracing” to interview the infected person and try to identify people who the person might have been in contact with in the past 14 days.

Nursing Supervisor Alicia Hills will lead the effort with public health staff and the support of the Oregon Health Authority. People identified as a close contact with this individual will be contacted, and Health Department officials ask people to respond to requests for interviews. People who have recently changed their address or phone number are asked to update the information with their medical providers, including doctors, dentists and the Health Department.

Bennett said he is “frustrated” that he hasn’t been given any other information, including general information such as when and where the person was tested.

“This is a really frustrating thing,” Bennett said Wednesday morning. “It’s hard for us to be responsive if we can’t know any of it.”

Bennett said he and the two other commissioners, Bill Harvey and Bruce Nichols, know they will field questions from residents regarding the county’s first confirmed case.

The Baker City Herald submitted the following questions to Bennett Wednesday morning.

- Age range — 60s, 70s, etc.
- Where and when was the person tested, and did the person seek treatment for symptoms?
- Was the person ever hospitalized?
- Has the person already been interviewed for contact tracing purposes, and is there an estimate of the number of

people likely to be contacted?

Bennett said he brought the questions to District Attorney Greg Baxter, who decides on public records requests.

Bennet said Baxter told him the information the Herald requested is protected under HIPAA.

Depending on the address of the resident who tested positive, the case could be listed by ZIP code next week.

This week the Oregon Health Authority for the first time listed positive cases by ZIP codes in its weekly update on the pandemic. That weekly report was compiled before the Baker County case was confirmed.

The Health Authority is combining confirmed cases for residents in ZIP codes with fewer than 1,000 residents. That means that if the Baker County resident who tested positive has an address in a ZIP code such as Sumpter or Bridgeport, with fewer than 1,000 residents, the case wouldn’t be listed under a single ZIP code.

In the Health Department

press release, the department’s director, Nancy Staten, said: “Our Health Department, county and community partners have been preparing for this day since we learned of this virus spreading its way across the world. Now that it is here, we need to not panic, but pull together as a community. Just because we have a confirmed case of COVID-19 in Baker County doesn’t change the everyday precautions that are already in place. Please understand this is a serious illness and take the appropriate measures to keep ourselves, our families and our community safe.”

Dr. Eric Lamb, the county’s public health officer, said in early April that the county would “undoubtedly” have confirmed cases of the virus.

As of Wednesday, three of Oregon’s 36 counties did not have a confirmed case — Gilliam, Lake and Wheeler.

Wheeler has the smallest population among Oregon counties, at 1,440. Gilliam is the third-smallest, with 1,990 residents. Lake County has

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