

# 'New Idaho' still improbable but would sway U.S. politics

Farmer hopes election discontent renews New Idaho discussion

By Jade McDowell  
EO Media Group

A year after La Grande farmer Ken Parsons proposed Oregon and Washington's eastern counties join Idaho, the idea is no closer to reality.

"I haven't heard a peep from anybody in probably six months," he said Monday.

Parsons hopes the idea might gain new legs after Election Day, however. The concept captured the region's imagination last year, spawning news articles and discussions of "what if" around the Pacific Northwest, because rural conservatives felt Boise might be more receptive to their ideas than Salem or Olympia. That feeling tends to be exacerbated by watching election results roll in.

Even if the idea remains nothing more than a hypothetical, those "what if" conversations offer an interesting political science exercise when looked at through the lens of the upcoming election.

One hypothetical model would see the 17 Oregon counties east of Hood River County and the 20 Washington Counties east of King County join Idaho. That scenario would see Oregon's population drop by about 13 percent and Washington's population by 22 percent, while Idaho's population would rise by 125 percent to 3.68 million.

Since the 435 seats in the House of Representatives are apportioned every 10 years based on the states' population count in latest census, Wash-

## New Idaho: Re-drawing the map

A La Grande, Ore. farmer is seeking comment on the idea of eastern portions of Washington and Oregon joining Idaho. The new, supersized Idaho would see a 125 percent population increase.



ington would likely lose two of its 10 representatives to Idaho, and Oregon could possibly lose one of its five representatives to another state.

Electoral College votes, meanwhile, are based on the number of senators and representatives a state has serving in Washington, D.C. If reliably blue state Washington lost two representatives and reliably red state Idaho gained two, future Republican presidents could count on another two "safe" Electoral College votes in the foreseeable future — possibly three, depending on whether Oregon grew enough to hang on to all of its representatives. In a tight race like 2016, it could make a difference.

The odds to all of that happening are slim to none, however. And Parsons understands that he's fighting an uphill battle. But he did say he was encouraged by what seemed like genuine inter-

est from a variety of Malheur County food producers who told the media last fall that they would join Idaho in a heartbeat if offered the chance.

"Everything about Malheur County is more identified with Idaho," Owyhee Produce general manager Shay Myers told the *Capital Press* at the time. "I wish I knew how to actually make this happen."

If Malheur County led the way, Parsons said, it was possible a handful of other counties would be on board with supporting an effort to redraw state lines.

"It all comes back, to me, to Malheur County," he said. "If they don't want to move into Idaho I don't see any other counties having the economic and political incentive."

Parsons said he is looking to be more of a "facilitator" than a leader on any movement toward secession, which is why he made a Yahoo group on the issue, which later spurred a Facebook group called "E. Washington/E. Oregon join Idaho."

That group drew 240 members, who have discussed topics such as messaging (they prefer talk of "shifting boundaries" to

"seceding") and the differences in responses by Idaho, Oregon and Washington on political questions such as allowing Syrian refugees into their state.

"One of the nice things about having Eastern Washington and Oregon be a part of Idaho, is that (maybe) people on the east side would stop viewing Democrats as awful Seattle and Portland liberals, but as Spokane or Boise moderates who want to reach a reasonable compromise," page administrator Dan Wallace wrote.

Parsons said even if the boundaries between the states never do change, generating public discussions around the issue sends a message to Democrats in Salem and Olympia that they shouldn't just run over the concerns of Republicans representing the eastern counties on topics such as minimum wage.

"It's saying, 'Listen, the people in eastern Oregon and eastern Washington are upset. They don't like what you're passing,'" he said.

# New state chief operating officer bucking cancer

By George Plaven  
EO Media Group



Katy Coba

Katy Coba was ready since April for this year's Tough Enough to Wear Pink day at the Pendleton Round-Up.

It has been a turbulent year for Coba, a Pendleton native and longtime director of the Oregon Department of Agriculture. She was diagnosed with breast cancer on Oct. 19, 2015, undergoing 12 weeks of chemotherapy and another six weeks of daily radiation treatment.

Coba said she was feeling healthy and ready to don her new pink shirt and cowboy boots at last month's rodeo. She was joined by her friend and fellow breast cancer survivor Ann Knutson, who traveled all the way from Oklahoma City to take part in Tough Enough to Wear Pink. In fact, the entire arena was awash in pink from the grandstands to the bucking chutes to raise money and awareness for local patients.

Last year, the Round-Up brought in more than \$36,000 for cancer support groups. Coba, 54, said she's always been thankful to the rodeo community for embracing such a good cause, supporting people like her personal cancer hero, Pendleton High School Spanish teacher Kathryn Youngman, who is facing her third bout with the disease.

This year, however, was different.

"This year will bring a whole new meaning, because it's touched me personally," Coba said before the event. "I think I will reflect on how lucky and blessed I am in so many ways."

Fortunately for Coba, she was able to catch her cancer early. It started with a routine mammogram, where doctors noticed a small lump on her left side that didn't look right. It was probably nothing serious, they told her, but scheduled an ultrasound and biopsy to be sure.

The results left both Coba and her doctors stunned — triple-positive breast cancer, the type that spreads more quickly and aggressively than usual. The worst part of the ordeal, Coba said, was breaking the news to her husband, Marshall, as well as their two grown daughters, friends and family.

"I wanted to protect them, because I knew they were going to be scared and worried about me," she said.

As for herself, Coba said she's very much a process person. She simply viewed it as another challenge to overcome.

"I just immediately went to, 'OK, I've got it. Now, what do I do about it?'" Coba said.

The treatments began with a lumpectomy in early November, where doctors removed the small lump from her breast. The cancer had not spread to her lymph nodes, which was a promising sign. She then began chemotherapy on Dec. 2.

If telling friends and family was the most difficult part of battling cancer, Coba said losing her long brown hair was the second-most difficult.

"When you lose your hair, you become a very visible patient," she said. "It's all out there in the public."

Chemotherapy and radiation can lead to a litany of side effects, yet Coba said she still felt well enough to continue working full-time at the ODA in Salem. She alerted her staff and Gov. Kate Brown, all of whom lent their support and pulled together to make sure the department didn't miss a beat.

"They would have been fine if I had been gone five days a week," Coba said with a laugh. "The overwhelming support was quite humbling."

Coba still has a long way to go before she's out of the woods. She will continue to receive targeted treatments via an IV injection once every three weeks through December. Breast cancer patients aren't declared cancer-free until after 10 years, assuming there are no setbacks.

In the meantime, Coba has plenty to keep her busy. She began her new job Oct. 1 as Oregon's new Chief Operating Officer, overseeing the day-to-day operations of state government.

Coba said the experience will also lead her to become an advocate for women to get regular mammograms and checkups, which in her case might have saved her life. The 1982 Round-Up queen said she was excited to be back home to support Tough Enough to Wear Pink, and hopes to reach out to cancer patients however she can.

"This has given me the opportunity to be thankful to live every day," she said.

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