

Values Voters

According to Ballotpedia, even after the Oregon District 5 Senate seat, long held by Democrats was taken over by a Republican this November, Democrats still control 63% of the State House and 60% of the State Senate. Exactly how much of the legislature do Democrats need to control before they enact some real change? I'm asking because some are blaming a third-party candidate for costing the Democrats the seat to a Republican claiming that somehow protecting the environment or enacting social justice reform will be harder now.

In 2016, then incumbent Arnie Roblan, a pro-gas Democrat, was seeking reelection to the district five Senate seat, a seat he won handily in 2012 against Republican Scott Roberts. Unopposed in the primary race, Roblan faced a tough general election challenge from Republican, Dick Anderson. Roblan eked out a win with a margin 48.24% to 47.68% for a razor thin 349-vote lead over Anderson from the 62,995 votes cast. A Libertarian candidate, Dan Souza garnered 4.08% for 2,568 votes leading many conservatives to accuse Souza of being a spoiler and throwing the race to Roblan.

The same accusations are now being wrongly hurled at Pacific Green Party candidate for senate district five, Shauleen Higgins after Democrat and Coos County Commissioner Melissa Cribbins lost her race for the district to Anderson. More on this, but it is amazing or more accurately appalling that both the major corporatist parties just assume they are entitled to votes for no other reason than whether they play for the red team or the blue team. Democrats and Republicans each view the other as the political anti-Christ but voting progressives are no longer able to distinguish any discernable or meaningful differences between the two parties.

Even before public-records revealed Cribbins' undeclared ex parte communications and emails revealed her very cozy

relationship with Jordan Cove lobbyists and executives, she was openly pro-gas. She accepts contributions from Jordan Cove backers, pro-gas lobbyists and from timber companies that want to privatize the Elliott Forest making her very distasteful to progressive voters. Yet many die-hard Democrats warned it was better to "hold your nose", "suck it up" and just swallow that bitter pill because anything is better than electing a Republican. The most powerful weapon we have is our vote and to just give it up on the promise that once a corporate shill is in office, we can flip them is just ludicrous. Seriously, how has that strategy worked out so far?

For almost 250 years, two parties have dominated and presided over the continued decline and erosion of the working middle class, our environment, the climate and allowed record levels of poverty, racial and income inequality, joblessness and homelessness. Republicans and Democrats have together increased protections for corporations while trouncing on the rights of whole communities. They have engaged in and incited needless foreign wars and most recently declined to pass an urgently needed stimulus bill to help struggling families suffering due to an out of control pandemic in order to "play politics".

Higgins, a Lakeside city councilor looked at the choices for this race and knew she couldn't vote for either candidate and so she bravely did the only logical thing and joined the race. Unlike her opponents she refused corporate donations, a requirement to obtain a Pacific Green Party nomination. She openly denounced the proposed Jordan Cove LNG project, promised to protect the environment while working toward sustainable jobs and even after suddenly taking ill still managed to garner more than 4% of the vote from a hospital room based upon her honesty and values. There is no way of knowing whether Cribbins would have received enough of Higgin's 3000 plus votes to prevail over Anderson but if we had RCV (Ranked Choice Voting) statewide people could vote for

more than one candidate per race and rank their choices by order of preference. If a candidate wins a majority of first preference votes they are declared the winner. If not, the candidate with the most second preference votes then moves up. This way no one would have to hold their nose again and both of the major parties would be forced to vet their candidates more closely to be sure to win.

Benton County enacted the RCV voting system and perhaps, if Cribbins wants to regain some trust with the liberals in her district, she might introduce such a measure here in Coos County.