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Small party wants bigger say on 'pocketbook issues'

1. Number _____
2. Proper Noun _____
3. Verb - Past Tense _____
4. Noun _____
5. Noun _____
6. Preposition Or Subordinating Conjunction _____
7. Noun _____
8. Adjective _____
9. Adjective _____
10. Adjective _____
11. Noun _____
12. Adjective _____
13. Noun _____
14. Adjective _____
15. Verb - Past Tense _____

Small party wants bigger say on 'pocketbook issues'

The Oregon Working Families Party, with _____Number_____,000 members, hopes to triple that by _____Proper_____ _____Noun_____

About the party and fusion voting

The Working Families Party was founded in New York in 1998. There is no national party, but Connecticut, South Carolina, Delaware, Vermont and Oregon have parties.

The Oregon party gained ballot access in 2006 with the aim of getting New York-style fusion voting reintroduced in Oregon, which outlawed it in 1895. It has remained legal in Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Mississippi, New York, South Carolina and Vermont.

In July, Gov. Ted Kulongoski approved what is known as aggregated fusion voting or what Oregon Working Families Party co-chair Barbara Dudley calls fusion-lite. It means as many as three parties that nominate a candidate can all appear on the same ballot line. Full fusion voting gives each nominating party its own ballot line -- making it clear how many votes a candidate garnered from each party.

State Sen. Diane Rosenbaum, D-Portland, when asked how she thinks the reintroduction of fusion voting might affect the political landscape, said it was difficult to predict.

"What (fusion voting) will do is strengthen the voice of third parties. If (third parties) are able to cross-endorse, candidates are going to be out there seeking those endorsements."

Contact information: oregonwfp.org

-- Rebecca KoffmanWith the _____Verb - Past Tense_____ ended this week, a small, little-known political party that focuses on workers' issues is launching a _____Noun_____ _____Noun_____ _____Preposition or subordinating conjunction_____ in anticipation of the November election.

The aim of the Oregon Working Families Party is to _____Noun_____ state policy by uniting rural and urban voters around _____Adjective_____ table economic issues that matter to working people. The party, which takes no position on _____Adjective_____ issues such as _____Adjective_____ marriage or _____Noun_____, promotes itself as "the _____Adjective_____ collar, _____Noun_____ issues party," says Jeff Anderson, a member of the party's steering committee.

A powerful tool it will use to push its agenda is an electoral strategy called fusion voting, a version of which became legal again in Oregon in 2009. It allows political parties to _____Adjective_____ candidates on the ballot -- that is, to give their support to candidates from other parties.

"It allows us to endorse candidates and then hold them _____Verb - Past Tense_____," said Barbara Dudley, party co-chair, "without running our own candidates who could function as spoilers."

Party representatives will soon start interviewing major party candidates to assess where they stand on Working Families Party issues.

The party has about 3,000 members, mainly in the Portland area and many of whom are union affiliated. Dudley hopes to have 10,000 registered members by August.

So who is joining the party and why? Bruce Cronk, 68, is a retired electrician and member of the United Steel Workers Union who lives in suburban Roseburg. He joined the OWFP after the 2008 general election because he felt that Republicans and Democrats were beholden to big business and Wall Street.

"Sen. Ron Wyden," he said, is "unabashed about his support of free trade. That doesn't make any points with me. The Democrats need a third party to push them to deal with workers' issues."

Keri Carter, 24, works for the Housing Authority of Portland. She attended an OWFP happy hour presentation about fusion voting.

"It really caught my interest," she said. "It allows third parties to play a much greater role. I decided that it was a party I wanted to give my full support to. Being a single mom, I love that they are pushing for short-term disability insurance for all Oregonians."

Another Portlander, Kelly Haines, 49, works part time for the city's Bureau of Planning and Sustainability and part time in a restaurant. She describes herself as very progressive and says she is passionate about the right of workers to organize. She also likes the party's campaign to establish a state-owned bank, similar to the one that has existed in North Dakota since 1919.

"I like the idea of keeping investments local," she said.

The idea is that state agencies would deposit their funds in the bank, which would then use them for loans to local farmers, students and small businesses and to promote the local economy in other ways. The party is asking major party candidates seeking endorsements to support the creation of a state bank.

Also on the platform for 2010: debt-free higher education and a call to "tie blue strings to green jobs." In other words, to make sure that green jobs that garner tax breaks for corporations are worker-friendly. Some green jobs -- recycling or solar energy installation, for example -- can pay low wages with no benefits.

"I really like that it doesn't have to be about red or blue," Haines said, "to be able to take an issues-based stand, and judge a candidate on those, is really effective."

Ron Rodgers, 39, a millwright from Sweet Home, makes a similar point. He was a registered Republican before switching

to OWFP, which, he said, "does a good job of isolating social issues and concentrating on issues that really matter to working people.

"The workers of this country," he said, "need a third party that looks out for them."

--Rebecca Koffman, Special to The Oregonian

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