

Position Paper - 3

Balance Political Power in the State

ver 1.0

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Summary of Position:

Oregonians of the rural southern and eastern counties clearly understand and have learned in unmistakable ways over the years that they have no voice and have no power over the State politics that controls their lives and their communities.

While I talked with a rancher in Harney County, he commented, “We are a different country out here. The political power is in those blue [urban] counties, but they have their own concerns, and I don't blame them for not caring about us.”

The rancher made a timeless and true observation about democracy – which is a topic in every political science class - people will vote their own interests. There is a famous saying about this potential problem with democracy, “51% of the voters can vote the other 49% to be their slaves.” In political science, this problem is termed the “tyranny of the majority.” The split of political power in Oregon between urban and rural counties has followed this exact mantra. This paper will explore the reasons for this division.

Is there anything that can be done so that political power can be more justly balanced in the State? This paper will also show that principles found in the US Constitution can be used to rectify this problem. These Constitutional principles can use the central idea of democracy, that political power comes from the voice of the people, to set up a more *republic* form of government in Oregon. A republic that is formed to try to eliminate or severely limit the problem of a tyrannical majority.

The Constitutional principles that need to be used in Oregon are:

- each county will supply one senator to the Oregon Senate,
- elect a governor on the basis of electoral votes allocated to each county, dependent on the population along with one vote for having a senator

Supporting Reasons for Position:¹

Political power in the State of Oregon is all about population. The election of Governor is dependent on a statewide count of votes for the office. Thus the larger populations of the urban areas will dominate votes from the sparsely populated rural counties.

A similar dynamic happens with election of State representatives and State senators, as these offices are aligned with population. Areas with higher population receive more representatives and senators. A quick look at the map of State House Districts for Oregon show the city of Portland with 24 representatives, while five rural counties of Lake, Harney, Malheur, Grant, and Baker have one. The Oregon Senate is similarly configured - only it becomes seven rural counties having one senator for the 12 senators of Portland.

Roughly speaking, rural counties which comprise about half of the land area of Oregon receive 1/20th of the political representation of the city of Portland. This is due to their populations being 1/20th of Portland. The result of this system is that people in rural counties have become political zeroes.

Oregon State Senate

There is something about this political inequality that should strike an American as strange. We have many states in America that are sparsely populated with numbers under one million. Why don't the states of New York and California with their combined populations of 60 million, have absolute control over politics at the Federal level like Portland has at the state level?

The main reason is at the Federal level, America does *not* have a "one man one vote" political system. The potentially fatal flaw of such a system is the aforementioned tyranny of the majority. From a historical perspective, the Founders were well aware of the trouble that contributed to the downfall of freedom in Rome when political leaders began to wield power by providing "bread and circuses"ⁱⁱ to win the large number of votes of the masses of the city.

The American Founders solved this problem by reaching what is called the "Grand Compromise."ⁱⁱⁱ This solution consisted of the idea that each Colony, big or small, would get the same representation in the Senate. Giving each state two senators in Congress allowed the Colonies to agree on the Constitution. It alleviated the fear of the states with small populations that they would end up as political zeroes, as has happened to the rural counties of southern and eastern Oregon.

While the Grand Compromise is often written about as simply a political compromise, it has the tremendous beneficial moral effect of providing political justice. Transferring some political power in this way to the more rural areas, and away from the dense populations provides a form of "location representation." It makes sure that each citizen, no matter where he lives, has representation in the republic and never becomes a zero with no political power.

Using the idea of location representation can be done in Oregon similarly to how it is done at the Federal level – it would consist of changing the way the Oregon Senate is constituted. Instead of being just another branch of state government chosen by population, the Oregon Senate would be a place where each county had equal representation.

Given the current state Senate with 30 senators, the most straightforward thing to do is to have each of the 36 counties represented by one senator. The current requirement of House and Senate approval for a state law would not change. This means that a law affecting the entire State would have to get approval from senators from a majority of the counties.

Electoral Votes^{iv}

Another important principle from the US Constitution that can be applied to Oregon is that of using the electoral vote. The way it would work is that the election of governor, the chief executive officer of the state, would be done by each county having electoral votes that are based on its percentage of state population and one vote for each senator.

There are two benefits that would come from using electoral votes. (Note: The mechanism found at the Federal level of using the electoral *college* would not be necessary in order to obtain these benefits.)

- (1) The weight of the populous counties in picking the governor is muted, so a more expansive appeal to other counties is required to win.
- (2) The problem of a corrupt county polluting the election count with fraudulent activity is removed.

As Americans we are already familiar with the first advantage. If the selection of the US president was based solely on population, that political race would consist of candidates spending time in a few populous states while relegating the rural states to political zeroes. But because of the use of electoral votes, the political weight of the populous states in picking the President is muted, so a more expansive appeal to other states is required to win. The same expanded campaigning would become necessary for selection of Oregon governor.

The second advantage became apparent after seeing the massive fraud of the November 2020 election. A small number of swing states had their vote corrupted because election counts in just one or two counties were hijacked. Because the election counts of each county were put into a single statewide tally, the final total in the state could be corrupted by one or two bad actors.

It was this the observation of this election fraud that illustrated the incredible wisdom of the electoral vote system at the Federal level in isolating states from fraud in another state. If a Federal presidential election was tallied simply by counting each voter's ballot by throwing them into a single pile, it would be true that a single state could corrupt the result by manufacturing false ballots. But with the electoral college, a single state only gets an unchanging number of votes. It doesn't matter if that state falsely creates millions of fraudulent ballots, it does not change their influence on the final result.

Using electoral votes allocated to each county to select the governor would have the same effect at the state level. Each county would have a set number of electoral votes that would contribute to the selection of governor. Any fraudulent activity in a corrupt county would not have the effect of canceling the legitimate votes in other counties.

The two changes of organizing the Oregon Senate to have equal representation for each county, and using set electoral votes for each county contributing election results will remove the problem of Oregon citizens becoming pawns with no political power. These ideas are directly from the inspired US Constitution that guided America to become the greatest nation on earth in a such a short time. These principles can provide the same freedom and prosperity for Oregon.

- i Some text taken or modified from the book “Save the Kid!” also written by the author
- ii https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bread_and_circuses
- iii <https://www.reference.com/history/great-compromise-1787-b16fd894cffc87d6>
- iv Idea for state level electoral votes first heard by the author from Lewis at a Rally held in John Day in March 2022