

Redistricting Hearings
Testimony of Michael DeWolf
September 13, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony.

State law prohibits redistricting plans which favor any political party, incumbent member, or other person. No preferential treatment is permitted, and no skewing of district lines to favor one major party's candidates over another.

Among other things, this legal prohibition means that non-affiliated voters - that is, citizens who have registered to vote with no preference for a political party - should be considered on an equal basis with other voters when developing redistricting maps so that their interests are not ignored.

The voter landscape has changed dramatically since district lines were last redrawn some 10 years ago.

Voters who register as non-affiliated are a very large and rapidly growing share of the electorate. As of July 2021, NAV-registered voters total 974,000 -- fully one-third of the electorate. NAV-registered voters in Oregon outnumber Republican-registered voters and may well overtake the ranks of Democratic-registered voters in the not-too-distant future, as shown in this chart:

Oregon voter registration trends

Source: Oregon Secretary of State, Elections Division: <https://sos.oregon.gov/elections/Pages/electionsstatistics.aspx>

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 (July)	Change since 2016		Percent of 2021 (July) Total
Democrat	978,018	958,784	976,409	970,284	1,048,364	1,027,256	49,238	5.0%	35.0%
Republican	712,212	698,791	706,744	701,970	759,340	731,282	19,070	2.7%	24.9%
Non-Affiliated	698,389	810,764	883,991	955,801	940,805	974,000	275,611	39.5%	33.2%
Minor parties/Other	183,103	184,606	188,806	185,747	120,177	198,895	15,792	8.6%	6.8%
Total	2,571,722	2,652,945	2,755,950	2,813,802	2,868,686	2,931,433	296,964	11.5%	

The ranks of voters registered as non-affiliated is growing at a much faster rate than either of the two major party's voters -- they grew by almost 40 percent in the past 5 years, while Democratic and

Republican voter registrations grew by low single digits. In just the first 7 months of this year alone, non-affiliated voter registrations grew by 83,000 relative to Democratic and Republican registrations.

In the current Congressional Districts 2, 4 and 5, NAV-registered voters actually outnumber their Democratic and their Republican counterparts, and they are a pretty close second in District 1.

Voter registrations by Congressional District

Source: Oregon Secretary of State, Elections Division, July 2021

	Democratic	Republican	Non-affiliated	Other	Total
CD 1	213,946	124,353	196,200	36,874	571,373
CD 2	151,046	202,513	206,043	42,968	602,570
CD 3	285,221	80,621	182,971	37,252	586,065
CD 4	188,636	165,660	196,171	42,002	592,469
CD 5	188,407	158,135	193,515	38,899	578,956
Total	1,027,256	731,282	974,900	197,995	2,931,433

Non-affiliated voters are, on the whole, younger than their Democratic and Republican counterparts -- by a wide margin. A thorough examination of statewide voter registration data obtained from the Oregon Secretary of State Elections Division (August 3, 2021), reveals that the median age of non-affiliated registered voters is 40 years, while the median age of registered Democrats and Republicans is 53 and 57, respectively.

Importantly, a new, expert study demonstrates that, in states with closed primary systems such as Oregon, **voters of color register as non-affiliated or independent at higher rates than Non-Hispanic White voters.** https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3831739 One can only conclude that, **unless the redistricting process considers non-affiliated voter registrations on an equal basis with party registrations, the interests of many voters of color may be marginalized.**

Non-affiliateds are treated inequitably in the electoral process. As examples, non-affiliated voters and candidates are barred from participating in public primaries for partisan offices. The filing requirements for non-affiliated candidates are much tougher to meet than the filing requirements for party candidates. See page 9, State Candidate Manual, "Filing Requirements for Partisan Office" at this link: <https://sos.oregon.gov/elections/Documents/statecandidates.pdf> . **These and other inequities must not be compounded by a redistricting process that ignores non-affiliated voters, or that treats them differently than other voters.**

Historically, district lines have been drawn by factoring in the election results for the two major parties. The enormous change in the electorate since the last redistricting process means this old way of doing things can only perpetuate inequities and worsen partisan bias.

The solution is straightforward. **Your analysis of alternative district maps should be based on voter registrations for all voters**, not on partisan electoral results. **The ESRI software being used in this redistricting process is equipped to access these data and provide a voter registration-based analysis of district maps. Such an analysis would test the impact of district map proposals on the full range of voters and help evaluate the maps for their fairness and equitability.**

The law and good government demand a nonpartisan, inclusive approach to redistricting. Please put aside partisan motives, follow the spirit and letter of the law, and **treat all voters equitably in the redistricting process.**

Respectfully,
Michael DeWolf
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