

Vote Green for a Change

by Karyn Moskowitz

I've been a grassroots activist for many years. One of the most important lessons I have learned in recent years is that there are many tools available to activists who want to make real change. One of these tools is electoral politics. While many may see the sad, demoralized state of politics in our country as a problem, I tend to see it as an opportunity.

One out of every five Oregonians is not registered with either the Democratic or Republican parties. What this means is that over 200,000 of us feel that we are not being represented by either of the two major parties. In fact, most of us do not even bother to vote anymore. Not participating in the political system, however, is just the same as giving our power and economic rights away to those who would like to abuse them.

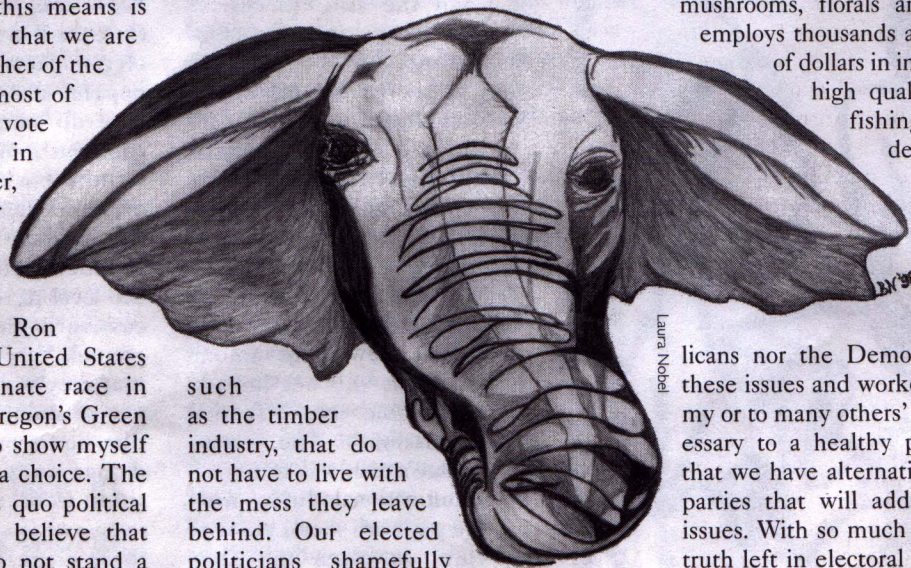
This year, I challenged Ron Wyden for a seat in the United States Senate. I entered the Senate race in Oregon as a Pacific Party (Oregon's Green Party) candidate this year to show myself and others that we do have a choice. The mainstream press and status quo political machines would like us to believe that third, or "minor" parties do not stand a chance; that the Pacific Party will throw a race toward the gruesome and scary "other" evil. Even the use of the word "bipartisan" is a tactic to exclude our rights to a third option.

Let me remind Oregonians that to vote for the lesser of the two evils, or one of the "Republicanrats," as I like to call them, is not really making a choice. When we vote without choosing we are further disenfranchising ourselves. Minor parties have always played a significant role in progressive politics. It was a minor party that first advocated for a social security system and for women's right to vote.

The two-party system gives us an illusion of choice, but actually continues to promote the same misguided and regressive eco-

nomic policies. The "salvage rider", for example, exempted all timber sales in national forests from public recourse, and started a wholesale clearcutting of our native forests, leading to floods, landslides and erosion of water quality. The Guestworkers Bill would have displaced Oregon workers and instituted a new form of legalized slavery within our borders. It is another example of the kind of policies supported by both Democrats and Republicans.

Most of us choose to live in Oregon because it is one of the most beautiful places in the world. However, I have watched our quality of life be consistently eroded by outsider extractive industries



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such as the timber industry, that do not have to live with the mess they leave behind. Our elected politicians shamefully pocket campaign contributions from Crown Pacific and other timber companies, and quietly turn their backs or pay lip service to our increasing ecological problems.

The media and others would like to compartmentalize the environment, health care, and crime as separate problems. This only tends to marginalize what we all know in our hearts to be the core issue: when we allow our native forests to be exported out of our communities, we also give away our long-term economic and social stability, our future cures for cancer and other affliction, our health, our jobs, and our quality of life.

Oregon's forests are the cheapest and most efficient water filtration plant in the world. Just ask the City of New York, which

recently decided to save seven billion dollars on a high technology water filtration plant by purchasing nearby Sterling Forest for one billion dollars. These forests are as valuable to the ecosystem as our lungs are to our bodies. Scientists estimate that the cost of removing unwanted carbon from the air is \$2-\$20 per ton. Our forests do this now. American taxpayers will pay the costs to save us from this pollution when the forests are gone.

Our natural environment is the core of every single commercial transaction. Our natural amenities attract retirees and high-wage employers into the area. Our special forest products industry, which consists of mushrooms, florals and medicinal plants, employs thousands and brings in millions of dollars in income every year. Our

high quality resorts and sport fishing industry, totally dependent on the last native temperate rainforests in the lower 48 states, are our communities' bread and butter.

Neither the Republicans nor the Democrats have taken on these issues and worked to resolve them to my or to many others' satisfaction. It is necessary to a healthy political environment that we have alternatives to major political parties that will address these important issues. With so much at stake, and so little truth left in electoral politics, it is virtually impossible for me not to be political. Just imagine the progressive change we can bring to this state if we vote with our hopes and not our fears. Candidates who are not beholden to special interests with big cash contributions can actually introduce legislation that will bring power back to the people. This year, there were over 120 Green Party candidates around the country willing to talk about the real issues such as publicly-financed elections, universal preventative health care, and long-term ecological and economic integrity—issues that you will not hear mentioned by representatives of the status quo. Being political means interacting with your fellow Oregonians to make life here more meaningful. After all, is that not what life is all about?