The DEMOCRAT
Moving Forward, United
January 2015 Edition

Saving the Environment, Protecting Puget Sound: It Is Everyone’s Job

By Representative Denny Heck, 10th Congressional District

Science and technology have advanced at an unprecedented pace. In recent years, we have come to realize that the economy is interdependent with the environment. We cannot continue to pursue a path of economic growth in a way that weakens our ability to meet the needs of future generations. The world is changing, and we must change with it. The current political climate in Congress, where Republicans have a majority, presents an opportunity to shape environmental policy. It is everyone’s job to protect our environment and ensure a sustainable future.

Changing Times and New Challenges for the Legislature

By Chris Reykdall, State Representative, 22nd Legislative District

In the words of the old Bob Dylan song, ‘The times they are a-changin’. Nothing truer could be spoken about the Washington State Legislature. Just four years ago the House had a 56 seat Democratic Majority that has now shrunk to 51 seats (just two seats away from a tie). Four years ago the State Senate had a three seat Democratic majority, today that has flipped to a three seat Republican majority (for this purpose I include Senator Tim Sheldon as a Republican, notwithstanding his campaign label). How and where is this change coming from? What are the implications for policy and budget development in the 2015 Legislative Session and beyond? Let me take a shot at these two central questions.

Where Did This Republican Change Come From?

This is complex but there are a few key things to understand. First, it was not just a President Obama/low voter turnout dynamic. Yes, that tipped a few races this last cycle, but one has to wonder how the Washington State House Democrats lost a seat in 2008 and again in 2012, both presidential election years with huge voter turnout and a very popular Barack Obama. Second, the House Democratic majority peaked at 62 seats in 2006. It has shrunk 11 seats over four election cycles; this trend has been long in the making. So here’s the painful truth – we aren’t as Democratic as you think.

Our presidents do well in this state – presidential races are high profile marketing events and big national themes are fully vetted; voters truly have a lot of information. Not to mention the Republican National Committee has not invested in Washington State (yet). The RNC has not given Washington State’s independents a reason to violate their left-leaning tendencies. But those presidential numbers don’t tell our story – the Governor races are really the best barometer for legislative races. Our Governor races are squeakers and if not for the Seattle-area’s substantial Democratic performance, our state would fail the way of Ohio, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and a host of other formerly blue strongholds. Republicans nationally have been pouring resources into our gubernatorial races over the last three cycles. In short, our legislative districts perform much more like our Governor candidates.

This last November, there were ten State House seats that were “swing” seats (the winner had less than a 7% victory over the defeated candidate). Republicans hold just three of those seats four years ago. Today, Republicans hold six of them with a real shot at a seventh seat in a 2015 special election in the 30th District (Federal Way). One of the remaining Democratic seats is in 31st District (Enumclaw, Buckley, Bonney Lake), where, only by the power of name recognition and hard work, does a long-standing Democrat hold the seat with virtually no chance of a Democratic victory if he ever steps down. If Legislative districts reflect the voters in our Governor’s races, the House will be very tight for many years to come!

Continued on page 8
Attention All Democrats: A Call to Action

By Roger Erskine, Chair, Thurston County Democrats

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

Martin Luther King Jr.

Good days ahead for Democrats

By Mizanur Rahman

2014 was a very important election year – but now it seems! That every year is an important election year. You and I and other voters in our county elected many really good candidates. We reelected Congressman Denny Heck. We also reelected our two really GREAT State Legislators in the 22nd Legislative District, Chris Reykdall and Sam Hunt. We also reelected some GREAT Thurston County officials: Steven Drew, Assessor; Mary Hall, Auditor; Gary Warnock, Coroner; Jon Tunheim, Prosecuting Attorney; and Shawn Myers, Treasurer.

We elected Linda Enlow as our County Clerk, and we reelected Russ Olsen and Chris Stearns as Public Utility District commissioners. But we also suffered two losses: County Commissioner Karen Valenzuela and Representative Kathy Haigh, from the 35th Legislative District, were unfortunately in their bids for reelection.

Still, all in all we had a very good election season. But ... it could have been a “vote sweep” if more of our people had voted – fewer than one-third of all registered voters in Thurston County even bothered to cast ballots in the last election.

So here we are now in 2015, and it is yet another very important election year. This is the year we elect key people to our councils and school districts.

We will have city council elections in the four cities – Olympia, in three, in Lacey, in three in Tumwater, three in Yelm, three in Tenino, three in Bucoda, and two in Rainier. We will also have school board elections – three in North Thurston, three in Olympia, and two in Tumwater. Plus we will have an important election for Olympia Port Commissioner.

These are the elected officials who make decisions that impact each of us almost immediately in very important ways, and hence these races are very important. But sadly, too often these elections have an even lower voter participation rate.

This year’s elections, many would say, are really a “warm up” for next year – 2016 is when we will elect a new Democromatic president, and we will reelect US Senator Patty Murray, Congressman Denny Heck and State Senator Karen Fraser.

We will also vote for governor – and as well as all of our state constitutional officials, all members of the state House of Representatives, both Supreme Court justices, eight Thurston County Superior Court justices, and two Thurston County Commissioners.

This year – and next year – we Thurston County Democrats will be active in all of these elections. In the coming months we will be hosting several ‘Voter Forums’ focusing on the issues which are on the minds of voters in Thurston County.

You will be receiving information on these important community discussions through our weekly Blast and also on our website.

I am counting on you to let us know what issues you are interested in discussing. You and I both know that we will be bombarded by mass media attempts to sell us their agenda, but we need to have our own discussions, based on our situations for our communitie, s our state and our country.

Another of my favorite leaders, John Gardner, the founder of Common Cause, said, “This is the time of breathtaking opportunities, disguised as unsolvable problems.”

We know from our hard work in the past several years, that when we take time to work together, to discuss the issues that are critical to each of us, operate strategically, bring activists together and organize, organize, organize we will be successful.

I am really excited to get started. I want each of you to share that excitement and commit yourselves to working hard for our Democratic candidates, this year and next year. We can do it!

I am really excited to get started. I want each of you to share that excitement and commit yourselves to working hard for our Democratic candidates, this year and next year. We can do it!
Better Thurston: Exploring New Approaches to County Government

By Judy McNickle

Most Washington voters have a different form of county government than the three-commissioner system that has been operating in Thurston County for more than a century. Olympia city council member Jim Cooper and a growing team of volunteers promoting “Better Thurston” think it’s time to consider a change.

In November Cooper presented the Better Thurston plan to adopt a Home Rule charter to the Thurston County Democrats, who voted to endorse Better Thurston and to formally ask county commissioners to call for an election of 15 freeholders next November to write a county charter in 2016.

“We’ve been operating with a three-commissioner form of government since the county was created in 1899,” Cooper recently explained. “We had 9,700 residents then; now we have more than 260,000. We need to reexamine how we function and explore options to modernize services to our growing community.”

Cooper, former chair of the Thurston County Democrats and current director of United Way of the Pacific Northwest, serves as volunteer spokesman for Better Thurston, a bipartisan group of local citizens discussing the possibility of revamping county government through a countywide election of freeholders.

“Our community hasn’t seriously considered modernizing since 1996,” Cooper explained. “Ideas have evolved and our population has grown significantly in 25 years so we’ve been studying for over a year how other counties have reorganized to better meet today’s needs.”

Seven counties, which contain more than half of the state’s population, have revised their three-member commissions into councils, Cooper reported. They have increased the number of members and elected them by districts, rather than at large, as we do, he said. Most of the councils, including King and Pierce, also have a separately-elected county executive.

“Adding commissioners will help us accomplish two major goals: improve representation of local citizens (one council member per 52,000 citizens compared to current ratio of three members for all 260,000 citizens) and enable those elected officials to better work together,” Cooper explained that as it stands now, “Two commissioners can’t even have coffee without public notice because they form a quorum. Five members will expand opportunities for cooperation and interaction among council members and with citizens.”

Better Thurston advocates a fresh look at the whole approach, Cooper says. “We want to modernize county government and are committed to getting freeholders elected and working together to shape the future of our community.”

Cooper notes that Better Thurston supports three specific changes. “We want a five-member council elected by district with a county executive,” he said. “We also think adding a step to the county government to amend our charter, and for citizens to participate in the initiative process is necessary. But only freeholders will have the authority to draft the charter. Better Thurston stands ready to help.”

That first step can be accomplished one of two ways: By the county commissioners, who can call for freeholder elections on the next countywide election ballot, or by volunteers who must collect approximately 8,500 signatures to put the proposal before the voters.

“Our optimistic we can get the freeholders on the ballot,” Cooper said. “Then the real work begins.”

Currently seven Washington counties have Home Rule charters: Clark, Chelan, King, Pierce, San Juan, Snohomish and Whatcom.

Thurston County has twice considered adopting a Home Rule charter. In 1978 and 1990, the proposals failed. Since then, local volunteers have considered numerous issues as they pondered ways to modernize a governmental system designed to serve fewer than 10,000 citizens 126 years ago. Among issues raised by veterans of past campaigns and newcomers to county government: How best to define a common vision for Thurston County? What do we want to achieve and how best to get there?

What problems are we trying to address? Do we need more commissioners or a county council? Do we need an appointed or an elected county executive? Do we need to revamp the way officials are elected – by district instead of at-large?

Who might best serve as a freeholder, a one-year position that evaporates once a revised charter is delivered to the voters? What qualifications are most needed?

Are the problems facing this county due to an outmoded governmental system or lack of adequate revenue following years of budget cuts? Or both?

What timeline makes most sense? Elect freeholders in an-off year (2015) when turnouts are traditionally lower but it might be easier to draw attention to the issues and the candidates? Or wait for a presidential election year (2016) with predicted higher turnout but lots more competition for time and attention?

Jim Cooper and Better Thurston volunteers agree the time to discuss these issues and develop a common understanding of how best to proceed is now. Let the conversations begin...and expand.

For more information about the Better Thurston effort, please visit www.betterthurston.org, email BetterThurston@gmail.com or contact Jim Cooper directly at 360-451-9053.

Judy McNickle is a PCO for Olympia #240 and a volunteer driver for the Olympia Meals on Wheels program. She retired after more than 30 years in communications for public higher education.
Thurston County Democratic Party Officers 2015

Thurston County Democrats

Roger Erskine, Chair

Roger was born in Minnesota. He and his wife Mary have 6 children, 13 grandsons, and 1 great grandson. Roger taught high school political science and economics before working for the National Education Association teachers union. As its Political Director in Minnesota, South Dakota, and Pennsylvania, he managed two gubernatorial campaigns as well as numerous legislative campaigns.

As manager for organizing at NEA, he helped build the membership to 2.8 million and organized the Teacher Union Reform Network. His work in Seattle led business leaders to label him the most outstanding urban education leader in America.

Roger lectures and serves on several education-related boards, chairs the Center for Ethical Leadership, and is the VP of Washington Public Education. She soon working for state government. She graduated from the Evergreen State College.

Doug Bell, 1st Vice Chair

Doug is a native of eastern Washington and graduated from Washington State University with a degree in mathematics. He worked for over 35 years as a software engineer before retiring and moving to Olympia in 2010. He has been active with the Thurston County Democrats since then and was active with the 48th LD Democrats and the King County Democrats prior to that.

He volunteers in math tutoring, the Thurston County Parks Advisory Board, and other causes as his curiosities strike him.

Susan Herring, 2nd Vice Chair

Susan was raised in south Seattle and in 1971 she moved to Olympia to attend the Evergreen State College. She graduated in 1975 and started working for state government. She soon joined the National Women’s Political Caucus and the Thurston County Democrats. She has served in many positions and was awarded the 2003 Democrat of the year award.

She is a strong proponent of civil rights and responsibilities and she continues to strive to make this a more just place for everyone.

Her favorite quotation: “Politics is only as good as the people who participate.”

Carolyn Cox, Secretary

Carolyn Cox, of Lacey, works in communications for the Washington State Department of Health. She is a former journalist who worked as a reporter and editor at daily newspapers in Florida, Kansas and Washington. She holds degrees in communications and expressive arts from the University of West Florida and The Evergreen State College.

She currently serves as a planning commissioner for the City of Lacey, is president of her neighborhood homeowners association, and is active in two local Toastmasters International clubs. She is also an artist, currently specializing in beaded jewelry.

Katrina Wynkoop Simmons, Treasurer

Katrina and her family have lived in Thurston County more than 25 years. She has served as PCO, Treasurer and Secretary for Thurston County Democrats and has volunteered in many campaigns.

Retired from the Washington State Department of Health, she owns a small business and works part time with the Adverse Childhood Experiences Partnership to reduce child abuse and neglect in our community.

Sandy Baxter, State Committee Woman

Sandy has worked for 16 years in Washington State elections; she spent nine years as San Juan County Elections Supervisor and she just recently retired from seven years with Thurston County Auditor’s Office. Her last position was Voter Outreach Coordinator for Mary Hall, the Thurston County Auditor, where she worked with candidates in the submission of their voter pamphlet statements for the local Voters’ Pamphlet. Sandy is especially proud of her outreach work on behalf of disabled/senior Thurston County voters. As a result of her work with disabled voters she was co-recipient of the Secretary of State’s “Champion for Voters with Disabilities” award in 2014.

She plans to bring her expertise in voter outreach and event planning to continue to make Thurston County Democrats one of the most respected county organizations in the state.

Mizanur Rahman, Member-at-Large, Burger Booth

Mizanur has lived in Thurston County for the last 27 years. He has been involved with local Democratic politics over a decade and has been a four-term PCO for Lacey 18. He is currently serving his second term as a member at large on the Thurston County Democrats Executive Committee and is the Chair of the Burger Booth Committee.

He has a Bachelors and Masters in Sociology and a professional degree in Culinary. He has been in food services for the last 30 years and has worked for the Military Club Systems at JBLM for the last 17 years as an executive chef.

He is a native of Bangladesh and has lived in America for the last 32 years. He is married with two sons, both of whom were born and raised in this area. The oldest son graduated from college and the youngest is in college.

“Politics is only as good as the people who participate.”
Dylan Carlson, State Committee Man

Dylan served four years as Chair of the 22nd LD Democrats and was elected as State Committeeman in 2012. He was also selected as a 10th CD delegate for Barack Obama to the 2012 Democratic National Convention in Charlotte.

In 2010, Dylan was recognized by the WA State Democrats with the Warren G Magnusen “Maggie” Award for Rising Star of the Year. He enjoys skiing, backpacking, and alpine mountaineering. He lives and works in Olympia.

Meren Gadman, Member at Large - Fundraising

Meren lives in Lacey with her husband of 34 years, Lacey City Council Member Jeff Gadman. Meren has been involved with fundraising since 1988 with the South Bay Fun Fair, most recently fundraising for March of Dimes and St. Jude’s Children’s Research Hospital.

He and Meren, married for 32+ years, have two wonderful daughters-in-law and a 3½ year old son. They have two successful raised two sons. They have two wonderful daughters-in-law and a 3½ year old granddaughter who is a constant source of enjoyment who makes her grandparents feel more special than anything else possibly could.

22nd Legislative District Officers

Judi Petersen, Chair

Judi is an Olympia native and a graduate of North Thurston High School. She worked as an LPN, at Sunset Life in Tumwater for several years, and then she went to DSHS and stayed there until she retired in 2010. She is PCO for Lacey #315 and runs the monthly Sunshine Raffle at the monthly meetings of the Thurston County Democrats.

She has one son and he and his wife have given her a granddaughter. She loves spending time with her family, when she is not spending as much time as possible volunteering at the Food Bank, where she has been since she retired. She is also a huge football fan – “go Seahawks!” She also loves to cook and bake.

Dennis Mansker, Vice Chair

Dennis is a Washington native who was whisked away at an early age to be raised in rural Oklahoma, but he was fortunate to emerge unscathed from that experience. He is a disabled Vietnam veteran and author of A Bad Attitude: A Novel from the Vietnam War. He is also a 1973 graduate of Western Washington University in Bellingham, where he was editor of the student newspaper, The Western Front.

He was shocked into political activism by the 2000 stolen election of George W. Bush and four years later served on the Washington State Veterans for Kerry Steering Committee. He serves as a PCO, is an enthusiastic Burger Booth volunteer, and was named TC Democrat of the Year for 2012. He is also the editor of The Thurston County Democrat.

Dennis is a retired state employee who has been a resident of Thurston County since 1985. He and his wife Susan have been married for 25 of the 32 years they have been together.

Jeff Gadman, Secretary-Treasurer

Jeff is a member of the Lacey City Council, appointed in early 2011, and elected in November 2011. His day job is Appraisal Division Manager of the Thurston County Assessor’s Office. He has been in the Assessor’s Office since 1986, and enjoys serving the public with all of the joys and responsibilities that come with public service.

He is a member of Lacey Rotary, an ambassador for the Safeplace Capital Campaign, and is involved in fundraising for St. Jude’s Children’s Research Hospital.

He and Meren, married for 32+ years, have successfully raised two sons. They have two wonderful daughters-in-law and a 3½ year old granddaughter who is a constant source of enjoyment who makes her grandparents feel more special than anything else possibly could.

Cynthia Pratt, State Committee Woman

Cynthia has been a resident of Thurston County since 1966 and a Lacey resident for 39½ years. She and her husband have two children, Beth and Brian, and 3 grandchildren. Cynthia is a lifetime member of TCD. She has been a volunteer.

Lacey PCO since 2004. Some of her committees included Thurston County Democrats Rules committee, State and County Convention Rules Committees, Campaign Services Committee, as well as being the 22nd LD State Committee Woman, the last two terms of which she served on the State Resolutions Committee. She is also a Lacey City Council member who will be running for a second term this year, and is a tireless Burger Booth volunteer.

Zach Smith, State Committee Man

Zach has been a Thurston County Democrat PCO since the early 1980s. He has also served on many committees and held several leadership positions in the Democratic Party and is currently a member of the Washington State Democrats Executive Committee.

With over 20 years working for the state employee’s union, Zach knows the importance of politics in the lives of working families. He feels it has been a privilege and honor to serve on many campaigns at the city, county, state and federal levels, working with Democrats to win elections that shape public policy.

Zach met his wife Megan while he was serving as 3rd Congressional District leader of the Young Democrats. They live in Olympia and have two children, Vincent, 12 and Selena, 15. Zach also has a 28 year old son with disabilities who lives on Vashon Island. Equi volorep tatiore hen dignam ad quae eastrum la doloruptaqui offic tem tert, con remodicient et volut volorerorum quis
Lord of all, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

What is going on here, and why don’t we have that version in the Constitution?

It’s because the majority of the Founding Fathers at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 wanted it to be clear that there would be a true separation of church and state in the new nation. A vocal minority wanted to acknowledge in the Constitution the divinity of Christ and the ultimate authority of God over the affairs of state. They were unsuccessful. At the time the Constitution was adopted, it was clear to all concerned (even if they accepted it with grave reservations, as some did) that this was, in the words of the Treaty of Tripoli in 1797, just ten years later, a government that “is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion.”

Fast forward to the Civil War. In 1863 a group of Protestant clergymen from the Northern States saw the Civil War as God’s punishment on the nation for turning its back on him and proposed the wording noted above as an amended Preamble.

The next year they founded the Christian Amendment Movement, which was quickly renamed to the more neutral-sounding National Reform Movement, and sent two different memorials to congress formally proposing similar wording.

None of them ever went anywhere. Other attempts were made in 1874, 1896 and 1910. In the “Red Scare” hysteria of the 1940s and 50s, even more amendments were proposed, including one with this wording: “This nation devoutly recognizes the authority and law of Jesus Christ, Savior and Ruler of nations, through whom are bestowed the blessings of Almighty God.” None of them were successful either.

So, the obvious question sort of asks itself: If this is, and was from the beginning, a “Christian Nation”, as so many modern pseudo-historians claim, then why did so many people take such great pains over the years to try to codify that into the Constitution? It is telling that the framers of the Constitution, although they were certainly free to do so, made no mention of God or Jesus Christ in the founding document of the United States. There’s your “original intent” right there.

We still have separation of church and state in this country. Let’s keep it that way.

## More on the “Christian Nation” of the United States

By Dennis Mansker, Editor, The Democrat

Here is the Preamble to US Constitution as it has read since the beginning, way back in 1787:

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insus domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

How is it could have been:

We, the people of the United States recognizing the being and attributes of Almighty God, the Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures, the law of God as the paramount rule, and Jesus, the Messiah, the Savior and Lord of all, in order to form a

## State Budgets--Big Challenges Ahead

By Representative Sam Hunt

22nd Legislative District

A s legislators converge on Olympia for the 2015 legislative session, budgets will be the dominant issue.

### Games Republicans Play

Republicans, as usual, have a simplistic answer. State revenues are expected to grow by more than $2.5 billion above the 2013-15 biennium totals. They say, “Obviously, there is more than enough to meet the state’s needs. First we can pass the Education First budget and use the leftovers to fund the rest of state government with that.”

The difficulty is that it just will not work. As Mark Twain said, “Get your facts first, then you can distort them as you please.” The so-called “Fund Education First” budget idea is a distortion and a phony catch-phrase. If the Legislatures did this, the rest of the budget would suffer. Shredding the social services safety net beyond what has already been cut would have devastating impacts. We might have increased education funding, but we would be expecting more homeless, hungry and sick children to excel in school. And senior citizens, foster children, the disabled, prisoners, and higher education would suffer huge cuts. And there would be no cost-of-living increases for state employees.

### The Real Problems

Here are some facts that help explain our situation:

- Washington’s economy is rebounding, but at a very slow pace. It took more than 5 years to recover all the jobs lost during the Great Recession.
- State revenues are rebounding at a much slower pace than the historical 4.5% after previous recessions.
- About 2/3 of the state budget is protected by constitutional and federal requirements; so any cuts must come from 1/3 of the budget higher education, corrections, general government.
- Yes, revenue collections are expected to grow by more than $2.5 - 2.8 billion. So what is the problem? Well here comes another list-projected projected additional spending needs:

  - Maintenance and carry forward costs $1.9 billion
  - Pension costs $2.95 billion
  - Debt service $2.00 billion
  - State employee health care $1.10 million
  - K-12 salary cost-of-living $400 million
  - State employee collective bargaining agreement $538 million
  - McCleary K-12 funding $1.21 billion
  - Initiative 1351 class size reduction $2 billion
  - Highest priority police needs $500 million

So if you add up all those numbers, the total is over $5 billion! Even if we did nothing with Initiative 1351 (highly unlikely), that leaves $2.45 billion above the projected annual revenue. And between 2018 and 2019 K-12 Education will need another $3.5-5.0 billion to meet statutory and constitutional requirements.

### State Revenues Rank Below Mississippi

Yes, it will take new revenues to meet our constitutional obligations. While voters asked for new programs and improved programs in the last 20 years, they also showed that they love to cut taxes. In 1995 Washington ranked 11th in state and local tax collections; by 2011, we ranked 35th, below Mississippi, and North Carolina.

In 1995, the same year the basic part of the state budget was equal to 7% of the state’s overall economy; in 2015 it is projected to dip under 5% and head to 4.5% in 2019. (One of the main culprits is Tim Eyman and his initiatives.)

### Note: Much of the numbers and statistics used in this article come from the Office of Financial Management. To read the full report and accompanying charts and graphs, go to www.ofm.wa.gov and click on “Budget preliminary outlook presentation” under the What’s New column.

For more information on our state’s horrendous tax structure, read Representative Reuven Carlyle’s excellent blog at http://reuven Carlyle36. com/2015/01/04/coasting- on-taxes-low-taxes-is-this-our vision/

Sam Hunt is Chair of the State Government (state agency operations, public disclosure, elections) Committee and member of the Education (K-12) and Appropriations (budget) Committees. Email him at sam.hunt@leg.wa.gov; follow him on Facebook at Representative Sam Hunt. His office is 438-B of the Legislative Building.
We Want You! – To Write for The Democrat

By Dennis Mansker, Editor, The Democrat

We rely on volunteers to put this paper together, four times a year, and all of the jobs associated with publishing this paper are important ones.

But there is one job that is more important than the others: Writing articles. Without articles we wouldn’t have a paper. In every issue we try to be informative, entertaining and relevant. Usually, I think, we succeed.

But I do know that there is a vast untapped reservoir of talent out there amongst you all, our readers. I want you to write for The Democrat.

We are always on the lookout for stories that will fulfill the mission of this paper, the mission of the Thurston County Democratic Party: Elect Democrats.

Anything, from candidate promotion to historical information, from social commentary to electoral politics, is a suitable topic for this paper, just as long as it promotes Democrats and Democratic values and will help to build the party. If you feel passionate about something, if you have the drive and the desire to tell it to your fellow Democrats, then you have a story.

We want that story. Your fellow Democrats want to hear from you – they want to hear what you have to say. Don’t worry that you are “not a writer”. Tell your story and I will edit it, correct the spelling, straighten out the grammar, and get your story into this paper.

You feel strongly about something. Tell me about it at editor@thurstondemocrats.org.
Changing Times and New Challenges for the Legislature

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It is also important to note the power of redistricting and the new centrism that has resulted from the top-two primary system. Redistricting has created too many “safe” seats on both sides of the aisle. This has resulted in millions of dollars being concentrated on a handful of remaining swing districts. The more money that goes in, the closer those races become 50-50 contests. Former “leans Democrat” seats have now become true swing seats. This is playing out all around us. Five districts surround our 22nd District, the 2nd, 20th, 26th, 28th, and 35th.

These neighboring districts contain 10 House seats and 5 Senate seats. The Republicans now control 14 of the 15 seats. Our Olympia/Tumwater/Lacey-based 22nd district is now an island of blue in a sea of red.

Top-Two Primary System a Factor

Another factor, the top-two primary system, has truly elevated some extremely right-wing candidates to the November ballot where they would have been handily defeated by the Democrat. But in today’s top-two system, we are not picking a party ballot, and moderation has ruled the day. Independents don’t have to make a forced choice, and they are increasingly voting for moderate Republicans in the primaries.

This same system has also elevated moderate Democrats over their more progressive counterparts in those key swing districts. The result is a set of November races where there is increasingly less daylight between the moderate Republican and the moderate Democrat. And that is the formula for shrinking the House Democrats from 62 seats to 51 seats in four election cycles. When you hear people say, “they’re all the same” when referring to candidates of the two major political parties, you can point out that our primary system is making it very difficult for voters to have much choice in the swing districts where it matters the most.

What are the Implications for the 2015 Legislative Session and Beyond?

This is the million dollar question. Make that the 55 billion question. With the Senate now firmly controlled by Republicans and the House barely in Democratic hands (with at least two House Democrats who will find it almost impossible to take risky tax votes, and several others who cannot take other progressive votes), the rule of the day will be compromise and moderation (these are not necessarily bad things!). The rule of the top-two primary, redistricting, the foreshadowing of tight governor’s races, and the shift to the right of both political parties has now come to bear on the Washington State Legislature. This session will be about compromise – both sides will give up sacred cows, and no single caucus agenda will rule the day. The emerging moderate Republicans in suburban swing districts will face the most pressure. Will they truly act as moderates, as most of them espoused in their campaigns, or align with their more extreme conservatives who hold a great deal more power and seniority within their respective caucuses?

If the moderates show up for are allowed to vote like moderates, we have a chance at school funding, a transportation investment package, state employee COLAs, higher education funding, and more. If excessive partisanship is fueled, then both sides will settle on a stalemate, preferring instead to gamble on who controls the Governor’s Mansion in 2016. This is the ultimate prize for Republicans in our state, and they may be well served to create a narrative of dysfunction in the State Capitol and then keep pounding on their theme that “the Democrats have been in control for too long, and things aren’t working. . . .” If the dysfunction brand serves their ultimate political purpose better than the compromise brand, they will play the former over the latter.

2015 will be an exciting year! Let me know how it’s going from your perspective.

Chris Reykdal is vice-chair of the House Education Committee. He will also serve on House Finance (tax policy), House Higher Education, and the House Rules Committee. Email him at chris.reykdal@leg.wa.gov; follow him on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/chris.reykdal; or on Twitter @chrisreykdal