Why Limit the Ideas We Bring to the Table?

The problems we face locally are practical. Our politics should be too.

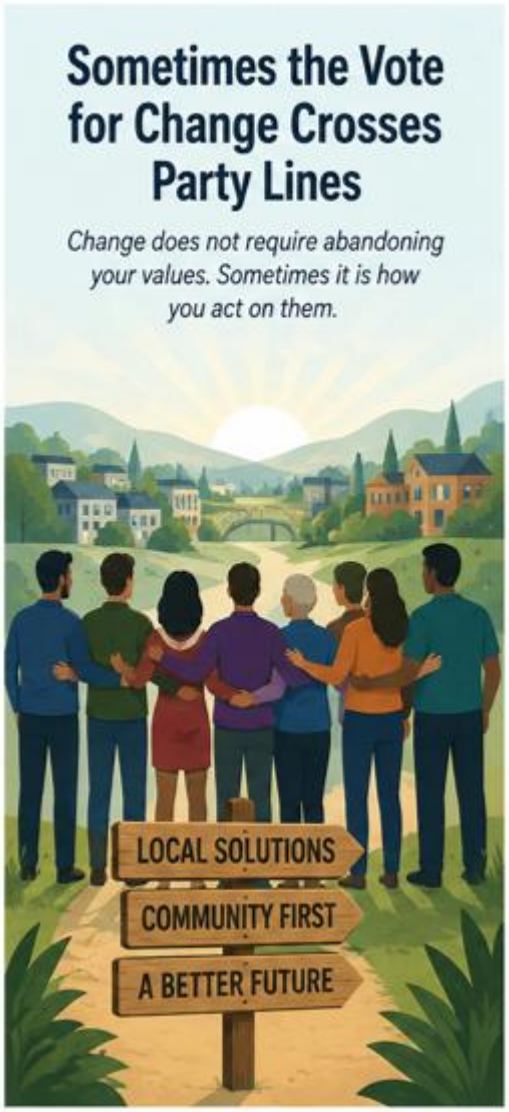
Most people I talk with do not begin their day thinking about political parties. They are thinking about whether they can afford their mortgage or rent, whether their child's school has the resources it needs, whether traffic is getting worse, whether a small business can stay open, whether utility bills will keep climbing, and whether their neighborhood will still feel like home ten years from now.

Those are practical questions, and they deserve practical answers. Yet too often, our political system starts somewhere else. It asks what Democrats think, what Republicans think, what one caucus supports, and what the other caucus opposes. That can narrow the conversation before it even begins.

Locally, we know better. A broken water line does not care which party you belong to. A police staffing shortage does not become easier because one side has a better slogan. A housing project still has to pencil. A street still has to be paved. A business still has to make payroll. The work eventually becomes practical. That is the level where I think our politics should begin.

Some of the best local work happens when people with very different backgrounds sit at the same table. A business owner sees one part of a problem. A teacher sees another. A nonprofit leader sees something else. A city employee understands the operational limits. A parent understands how the issue affects a household. A contractor knows what can actually be built. A neighborhood resident may see an unintended consequence nobody else considered.

None of those perspectives are complete by itself. Put them together, though, and the solution usually gets better. That is not complicated political theory. It is how communities function. When we are at our best, we do not ask, "Whose side is this idea from?" We ask, "Will it work?" That distinction matters.



Political parties serve a purpose. They organize people, priorities, and values. But there is a difference between having a political philosophy and allowing a political label to determine the answer before the question has been fully considered.

Think about something as familiar as housing. One person may emphasize removing unnecessary regulation. Another may emphasize tenant stability and affordability. Another may focus on infrastructure capacity. Another may point to financing, workforce shortages, or land availability.

Why would we intentionally throw any of those perspectives away? The most useful solution may involve pieces of all of them. The same is true for schools. We can talk about funding and accountability, student achievement and student support, career preparation and college readiness, teacher retention and administrative efficiency. None of those ideas has to defeat the others before we can make progress. Sometimes the better answer is simply that both things matter.

Serving locally has reinforced something for me: even a good policy idea can become a bad policy if we do not understand how it lands on the ground. State legislation eventually reaches a city budget, school district, employer, nonprofit, utility, police department, housing provider, or family. That is where the theory becomes real. Sometimes the intent is good but implementation is expensive. Sometimes a statewide solution makes sense in one community and creates problems in another. Sometimes an incentive or program works exactly as intended for years and then circumstances change.

That does not mean everyone involved in the earlier decision was wrong. It means conditions changed. That is normal. We should be able to say, "That helped us get here, and now we need the next approach," without turning every policy discussion into a search for someone to blame.

That is how most of us handle change in our own lives. We replace a vehicle that once served us well. A business updates a process that worked for ten years. A school changes a program because students' needs changed. A farmer changes equipment. A family adjusts its budget. We do not usually call that betrayal. We call it adapting. Government should be capable of the same thing. Past decisions can be stepping stones rather than permanent destinations. We can appreciate what they accomplished, learn from what followed, and still recognize when it is time for a fresh idea or a different approach.

We talk frequently about the value of diversity. That principle should include diversity of thought. I want people at the table who have built businesses, worked in classrooms, understood poverty, managed budgets, worked in government, questioned government, led large institutions, and experienced what happens when large institutions overlook ordinary people. Those perspectives may conflict. That can be useful. Constructive disagreement can expose weaknesses in an idea before the weakness becomes public policy.

A room where everybody sees the world the same way may feel comfortable, but it is not necessarily the best place to solve difficult problems. Someone should be asking whether an assumption remains true. Someone should be asking how a policy will actually work locally. Someone should be considering the unintended consequence. And someone should occasionally be willing to say, "There may be another way." The objective is not disagreement for its own sake. It is to enlarge the pool of ideas from which we find solutions.

This is also why crossing a party line should not feel extraordinary. Voting for someone outside your party does not mean abandoning your values. It means evaluating the person, the problem, and the moment. We already do this everywhere else in life. We do not hire a plumber because of party registration. We do not choose a doctor based on a caucus. We do not ask whether the mechanic repairing our car shares our political identity.

We look for competence, judgment, trust, and results. Public service deserves at least that much consideration. A Democrat can support an Independent and remain a Democrat. A Republican can agree with a Democratic idea and remain a Republican. An Independent can support ideas from either side. A nonaffiliated voter can evaluate everyone. That is not ideological confusion. It is independent judgment.

My own political registration evolved as my experiences changed. I spent years as a non-affiliated voter. Over time, my work across business, nonprofit service, housing, economic development, community organizations, and local government exposed me to problems that did not fit neatly inside one political framework. I found ideas I valued in different places.

Eventually, becoming an Independent made the most sense because I wanted the freedom to consider all of those ideas without first asking which party owned them. In this election, I am the Independent Party nominee and have also received Republican cross-nomination. I do not view that as an instruction for anyone else to adopt either identity. I see it as evidence that people who begin in different political places can still find enough common ground to work together. That is the part that matters.

The next Legislature will face difficult questions about housing, schools, transportation, economic competitiveness, energy, public safety, taxation, and affordability. None will be solved by simply choosing the correct party talking point. They will require tradeoffs, listening, and people willing to change their minds when

the facts change. Most importantly, they will require legislators who understand that policies ultimately have to work somewhere real: in Hillsboro, in Cornelius, in Forest Grove, in a classroom, in a small business, and at a kitchen table.

That is where I believe public policy should begin and end. Not with the party, but with the problem. Not with protecting yesterday's position, but with finding tomorrow's solution. And not by limiting the ideas we are willing to consider, but by bringing more of them to the table. When the challenges are practical, our politics should be practical too.

We already solve problems this way in our communities. Local government teaches humility.

