

House Joint Memorial 6
House Rules Committee Hearing on
3:00 PM in Room 50 April 10, 2013



Tax Fairness Oregon, and other sister organizations nation-wide, works to promote a fair tax code that serves the common good. We meet with the Oregon Legislature and our state delegation to advocate for tax laws that are fair, stable and adequate for the infrastructure and services needed to serve the majority of our citizens. This is one the most important functions of government. Fairness lies at the heart of all the work we do and we believe underlies the intent of the Constitution.

US citizens need to know that their system of government is fair and protects the interests of the average citizen, not just the prosperous and the privileged. That perception of fairness has eroded in recent years due to the over-reaching influence of corporate power and the vast sums of money in politics provided by large corporations and the extremely wealthy few. Instead of a level playing field where each person's voice can be heard, we see the distortions of the truth in ads that this money can buy. The ideas of a few are broadcast everywhere as though they are facts. Average people have little voice, power or influence to counter the assertions made by the most powerful.

Corporate money is one of the biggest influencers on our government today. Highly-paid and powerful corporate lobbyists have access to our decision makers that was unheard of years ago. Laws to reduce corporate taxes, especially in tax credits and loopholes, have escalated since the 70s and 80s. Corporations and the wealthy now pay lower effective tax rates than they used to pay and a far smaller share in state and federal taxes overall. States compete to offer reduced taxes to corporations, and corporations threaten to leave the state if their taxes go up. At the same time as they get more tax credits, they outsource jobs and increase robotics production at the expense of their own workers and fellow citizens. The tax structure for the wealthy is likewise tipped in their favor through deductions only the rich can take advantage of. Working people lower income levels, pay a higher proportion of their income in taxes, and their taxes are taken out of their paychecks just as soon as they earn it. The wealthy can hold onto their income and earn interest on it until their tax lawyers figure out all the deductions they can take. Increasingly, the rich have been getting much, much richer while the lowest earners are falling behind. All of this is well-documented in recent articles.

Is this fair? Why is this happening? One reason is that there have been two pervasive assumptions that have enabled this to happen. One is corporations have the same constitutional rights as human people have, and the other is that money is the same as free speech. The courts have used these assumptions to grant these powers to corporations and the wealthy few. Yet nowhere in the Constitution or in our laws are corporations provided with these rights and the wealthy such power. Has each corporation taken a poll of all its workers to determine how they wish to vote and for whom? No, a small board decides to put vast sums toward the issues and candidates they support to ensure maximum profit for their corporation. Concern for the common good is not part of their corporate charter.

Is this process democratic? And yet the outcome affects everyone. Should a few people or corporations with millions to spend be able to blanket the publicly-owned airwaves on every radio and TV station, to get their messages heard? Does this not drown out all the multitudes of other voices that do not have money? Is this what one person, one vote means? Does this foster or inhibit the democratic process?

We can overcome these faulty assumptions. Joint Memorial 6 is a first step towards countering this trend and righting some wrongs to fairness. HJM6 needs to go forward to ensure that corporations are clearly not seen as having the rights of individuals and that money is not equivalent to free speech. This clarification can only be achieved by amending the Constitution. A fair system of governance and the protection of the common good can be assured by such a step.

For Tax Fairness Oregon

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Tax Fairness Oregon is a nearly all-volunteer group advocating for fair, stable and adequate taxes