



## OREGON BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

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### **Oregon Business Association**

To: Chair Hoyle and Members of the House Rules Committee  
From: Joel Fischer, Senior Policy Analyst, OBA  
Date: February 24, 2014  
Re: Unified Primary

Chair Hoyle and Members of the House Rules Committee,

The Oregon Business Association believes that a well-functioning democracy is essential to the state's overall success.

Oregon has a history of being a leader in this nation as a participatory democracy. Our vote by mail and citizen's initiative process allow Oregon voters a high level of political engagement. General election turnout in Oregon since the year 2000 has averaged 78%. However, turnout in our primary elections in the same time span only averaged 46%; a 32% difference.

About 30% of Oregonians registered to vote are shut out of Oregon's primary elections because they do not belong to one of the two major political parties. And that number is growing. Some choose to register with a smaller party, but most choose no political party affiliation at all. The percentage of nonaffiliated or minor party voters in Oregonians is on pace to surpass the number of Oregonians registered as Republicans. Already similar in size to Republicans and Democrats, nonaffiliated voters are not allowed to participate fully in Oregon's election system.

The Unified Primary would allow all Oregonians who wish to participate in our democracy a chance to do so. Instead of a closed primary system where only those who are associated with a party can participate, everyone who is registered to vote could vote. The Unified Primary system is simple and fair. All voters would cast an up or down vote on each candidate.

The benefits of the Unified Primary are not limited to nonaffiliated voters. If a voter who is registered as a Democrat must choose between a Democrat and a Republican in the general election, why shouldn't that voter be allowed to help choose which Republican will be they will have a chance to vote for in the general election? Try answering the same question again without party labels. If a voter must choose between two candidates in the general election, why shouldn't they be able to help choose both candidates? All this would be possible with the unified primary system, which would not shut anyone out of Oregon's election system.

The goal of a democracy is to allow voters to choose who will represent them, why continue to deny them half of the process? The electorate is changing, and our elections system needs to



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change with it. OBA urges you to support a Unified Primary system which will make Oregon the most robust and participatory democracy in the union.

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