

Chair Val Hoyle and members of the Committee

My name is Jacob Strandlien, I am a freelance computer technician in north Eugene, and I am submitting this testimony in support of HJM2.

For the second time in our nation's history, we face a specific kind a threat. Not a threat of a foreign enemy or of terrorism or of a natural disaster, but a threat of growing corruption from the inside of our very system of government.

Today's threat is in the hundreds of millions of dollars that are being pumped in, directly or indirectly, to this nation's election system. In the last Presidential election cycle, total expenditures from inside and outside the campaigns rose to well over one billion dollars. At the federal level, Senators and Representatives allocate between one third and two thirds of their schedule for fundraising, depending on who you ask. This is because every federal legislator wakes up Monday morning knowing that most elections are won by the candidate with more money, so they need to earn over ten thousand dollars that week or they may not be re-elected. Much of this time is spent sitting in a room, making calls to donors, and asking for contributions.

“Contributions” is a term that is today more of a euphemism. Let's call them what they really have become: bribes. They may not be bribes in a strictly legal sense, but you would be hard-pressed to convince me that any organization would buy tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars of ads in favor of a political candidate and not expect something in return, and the numbers bear that out. A 2014 study published by Princeton University showed that at the federal level, policy decisions very heavily favored wealthy donors, corporations, PACs, and other moneyed groups rather than the average voter. A lot of these quid-pro-quo relationships that very closely resemble bribery can of course never be proven, but they are the disease that infects today's politics.

The framers of the US Constitution did a very good job of setting up a system of checks and balances, never giving one specific person or entity too much power over the others so that any disruptive influences could be controlled. However, it wasn't perfect, and they knew it wasn't, which is why they had the wisdom to give us not one. but two ways to make changes to the document; through an act of Congress and through a Convention called by the States.

There are those who ask me whether it is really necessary for the States to call a convention in order to solve this problem. It is. We have explored every other option. Congress has passed several types of campaign finance reform, McCain-Finegold being among the most recent and well-known attempts. However, most of those changes have been struck down by the Supreme Court, in decisions such as Citizens United V. the FEC. Oregon, among other states, has passed resolutions requesting that federal legislators propose an amendment to solve the problem; those requests have gone unheard. The Disclose Act was introduced in the US Congress that would have let us at least know who is making these billions of dollars of contributions, but it didn't even make it to a floor vote.

There are those who ask me whether it is safe to call a convention when none have happened since the Constitution was originally drafted. It is. Not only is a convention called by the States limited to proposing Amendments, and not only is HJM2 and equivalent resolutions in other States designed to call a limited convention to address this specific issue, but we have one last protection in our favor: ratification. We have documents, studies, and other evidence that shows that a convention – if called – would remain under control and on-topic. This evidence has been submitted for your consideration. But even if we are wrong – even if by some trickery or shifty dealings a badly-designed, off-topic, one-

sided, or overreaching amendment comes out of the convention, it would be stopped by ratification. The amendment would need to pass both houses of thirty-eight states to be applied to the Constitution, meaning that if as few as thirteen out of the ninety-nine legislative houses in the nation decides the amendment is in some way inappropriate, it will not be ratified. And as contentious as our politics has become, this is a fantastic safeguard against this type of problem.

And if that weren't enough, consider this: I mentioned that this is the second time our nation has faced this type of danger. The first was in the 19th and early 20th centuries when federal Senators were elected by state legislatures. There were frequent allegations that Senators were buying their seats by paying off state senators and representatives. The problem got so bad by the late 1800s that states began calling for a convention to propose an amendment on the topic. In the end, 27 states called for that convention, four short of the threshold at that time. The US Congress, partially due to distaste for the idea that the States would supersede their authority, then passed the conference report that would be ratified as the 17th amendment, one of our strongest amendments, and now US Senators are elected by popular vote.

Make no mistake, my colleagues and I are in favor of going to a convention if necessary, but this is also a fantastic point of pressure to get the federal Congress to do the right thing. I will conclude with this: According to numbers compiled by the Center for Responsive Politics, 81-94% of recent US Congressional elections have been won by the candidate with more money. I don't know about you, but I would rather that 81-94% of those elections would be won by the candidate with the best ideas. I urge you to support HJM2, and allow us to open the conversation, to make Oregon a leader in the fight against the corruption we see today, and to make this a better nation for tomorrow.

Jacob Strandlien