



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF OREGON

April 8, 2015

To: House Rules Committee
Representative Val Hoyle, Chair

Re: HB 3397 Expanding definition of "political committee" -- Comment

The League of Women Voters is a 95-year-old grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. The League of Women Voters of the United States and the LWV of Oregon have studied campaign finance several times and support full disclosure of campaign contributions and expenditures. The LWV Education Fund of Oregon, the charitable and educational arm of the League, also publishes a nonpartisan Voters' Guide for at least all Oregon primary and general elections. In our voters' guides, and in general, the League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party. However, separately from our voters' guides, the League does at times support or oppose ballot measures, if our members have done an appropriate study, and if we have a position on the subject.

The purpose of HB 3397, as we understand it, is to increase the campaign disclosure for outside groups that try to influence Oregon elections and ballot measures, and the League supports this purpose. These groups are often 501(c)(4) nonprofit corporations that are often know as "super PACs". They generally make what are known as "independent expenditures" in Oregon elections, but they often avoid otherwise required campaign disclosure in Oregon by not directly referring to candidate and ballot measure names.

HB 3397, as currently written, adds to the definition of a political committee any group that spends \$500 or more in aggregate and "refers" to a candidate, ballot measure or political party within 60 days of an election. Such a political committee would then be required by law to disclose all its contributions and expenditures. HB 3397 then attempts to exclude from the definitions of contribution and expenditure any "Nonpartisan activity designed to encourage individuals to vote or to register to vote, **provided that the nonpartisan activity does not refer to a particular candidate, measure or political party within 60 calendar days of a primary or general election.**"

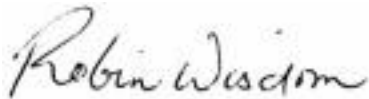
The problem with HB 3397 is that this is exactly what the LWV Education Fund does with its nonpartisan voters' guides. There are other groups that also provide nonpartisan information by name about candidates, ballot measures and political parties without trying to influence the outcome of the any election. Such groups might be the Oregonian during election seasons <<http://gov.oregonlive.com/>>, the Sunlight Foundation <<http://sunlightfoundation.com/>>, Project Vote Smart <<http://votesmart.org/>>, and others.

Rather than amending the definitions of political committee, contributions and expenditures, the League thinks that better ways to accomplish the purposes of this bill are to:

- 1) Expand the definition of an "independent expenditure" to include groups that are trying to influence elections without directly referring to the names of candidates, ballot measures or political parties,
- 2) And then require more disclosure of contributions and expenditures that support the independent expenditure.

The League has been working with Legislature Counsel on an amendment to HB 3397 that will do just these things.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation.



Robin Wisdom
LWVOR President



Norman Turrill
Governance Specialist