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Attorneys at Law

TESTIMONY ON HB 3287

Date: April 14th, 2015
To: House Rules Committee

Dear Chair Hoyle and Members of The Committee,

My name is Robert Harris and I'm a Hillsboro business owner, attorney and senior policy advisor to the Independent Party of Oregon (IPO). I speak in support of HB 3287 as an Independent voter and election reformer and ask that this written testimony be made a part of the Legislative record.

HB 3287 is an important step in opening up the primary process to more candidates and thus voters. It improves the process by making elections more competitive and attracting more voters. Without this change, the IPO will be hard pressed to recruit enough talented candidates to run many competitive races in the 2016 election and non affiliated voters whom the IPO seeks to empower in the May 2016 primary will again be short changed.

I closely followed the Measure 90 (Top Two primary) election last November. It was notable that while people disagreed whether a top two primary was a good or bad idea, everyone was concerned about the growing number of people who were being excluded from the election process. While one can argue that that exclusion is self selecting, the reality is, over 50% of new voters are opting to not join the Democratic or Republican Parties.

In response to that concern, Rep. Hoyle sponsored HB 3500, allowing non affiliated voters the opportunity to register as a major party member concurrently with returning a major party primary election ballot. I understand that concept is going continue to be studied by a work group going forward and I support that. In the meantime, HB 3287 is a crucial factor in expanding participation in the 2016 primary election. Here's how.

There have been two important developments recently for NAVs. First, the Independent Party of Oregon reached major party status in February, 2015. Second, The Independent Party last week voted to open up its primary election to NAV voters.

NAVs will now have the opportunity to participate in the May partisan IPO primary elections, if they want to. The problem is under current law the IPO faces stiff restrictions as to who it may qualify as its candidates. And with few candidates, NAVs may choose not to participate in the IPO open primary. HB 3287 addresses that problem. Without this change IPO primary could have over 650,000 eligible voters, but few candidates. Thus discouraging participation by NAVs.

And, there is simply no logic behind a State mandated requirement for party

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candidates to have membership duration requirements. While fear of a party switching candidate hijacking a nomination is real, it's an issue that can and should be resolved by the parties by rule adopted by the party itself. If the Democratic or Republican Party opts to keep the current candidate requirements, it can do so. As many anti Measure 90 people argued, candidates should be selected by the parties. If that is so, then shouldn't candidate criteria should also be set by the parties, not the State Legislature?

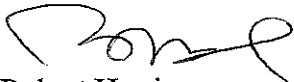
Many of you recognize the threat to confidence in government when more people don't, or can't, participate in elections. Rep. Hoyle started a good discussion with HB 3500 and her commitment to continue that discussion. Now, because of the IPO's new major party status and its decision to open up its primary to NAVs, adopting HB 3287 would mark a significant step towards recognizing the rights of non affiliated voters to participate in elections. But without candidates, elections are a moot point. Passing HB 3287 is a significant step forward for election reform. And, importantly, it would prove that our Legislators are serious about empowering independent voters.

Here is the key question. What really is the point of the 250 day law that can't be achieved through party rule? Especially as there is no similar concern about write in candidates, where under current law a non party member can win a party nomination with a handful of write in votes.

Then ask yourself whether allowing the parties to set their own candidate qualification rules and getting more candidates and voters involved in a more robust primary election is good for Democracy, a good way to rebuild faith in government and good for Oregonians and Oregon.

I'm asking you to support HB3287, empower the political parties to set police their own candidates, and give us the tools necessary to give non affiliated voters some choices in 2016. Allow the IPO the time necessary to recruit good candidates to run for public office. It's good for Oregon.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



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