

To: Senate Committee on Rules

From: The Main Street Alliance of Oregon

Date: April 21, 2015

Re: Support of SJR 5

Chair Rosenbaum, Vice Chair Ferrioli and Members of the Committee,

**The Main Street Alliance of Oregon, a coalition of over 2500 small businesses across Oregon, supports SJR 5, proposing an Amendment to the Oregon Constitution—to be approved by a public vote in the November 2016 General Election—to allow for the Legislature and the Public to set certain limits on political campaign contributions.**

Transparency and ensuring equal voice in elections is essential to Oregon and democracy in general. Since the U.S. Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision in 2010, the amount of money flooding our electoral and political systems has been outrageous. This needs to change.

Oregon is often leader on innovation and progress, however, **44 other states currently have contribution limits for candidate support in elections, leaving Oregon lagging far behind.** We have an opportunity now to change this, and ensure a level playing field for all in Oregon's elections.

As a part of our outreach and research, The Main Street Alliance of Oregon has surveyed businesses owners across the state. From Astoria to Pendleton, Hood River to Medford, all across Oregon, we have been engaging small business owners on issues that impact them, their families, their businesses and their communities.

**Over 91% of Main Street businesses we surveyed said without doubt, *Citizens United* has negatively impacted their businesses.** This is not a partisan issue, across the isle, business owners agree that unlimited spending in elections is bad for business, bad for our communities, and bad for our country. **In fact, 90% of those business owners are in support of a Constitutional Amendment declaring "corporations are not people and money is not speech."**

It's no surprise why small business owners feel this way, they're working families too. Main Street businesses owners in Oregon don't have tens- and hundreds-of-thousands of dollars to spend in elections like the Big Business and Special Interests. Instead, **we pour our profits right back into our businesses. By investing in our employees and our communities, we**

**are investing in our businesses, and helping to keep our local economies strong.**

Instead of investing in their communities like us, Big Business and Special Interests are extracting wealth right out of our customers' and our pockets—right out of our communities and economy. They're taking these extracted resources and pouring them into elections and candidates who will vote to keep giving them special treatment and favors.

Not only does a lack of contribution limits give undue access and influence to those who can afford to spend the most, it also has made it increasingly challenging—near impossible—for working family Oregonians and small businesses owners to run for office themselves. **In Oregon we pride ourselves on our Citizen Legislature, but when not all citizens have an equal opportunity to run for office and participate in electoral process, we clearly need to make some critical changes.**

Due to current laws, our Legislature cannot make any of these important changes that Main Street and the communities we serve are calling for, SJR 5 would change that in a very straightforward way. The amendment would grant authority to the Legislature or voters to establish common sense campaign contribution limits. After legislative approval an amendment to the Oregon constitution would be referred to the voters for November 2016 General Election.

**Your constituents have been calling for these kinds of limits for decades; voters passed contribution limits in 1994 and again in 2006, but the Oregon Supreme Court said that there needs to be explicit Constitutional Authorization to implement limits.** If you pass SJR 5, it will establish this in our Constitution, and protect the *people's right* to put limits in place.

**Take a stand support SJR 5 and supports election reform, it sends a powerful signal to Main Street small business owners and other Oregonians that you hear our concerns.** Contribution limits promote the First Amendment—they level the playing field for Main Street and our communities and ensure our voices actually count—not just those who are able to contribute large sums of money.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical matter.

Regards,



Stephen Michael

State Director, The Main Street Alliance of Oregon