



Testimony on SJR 5

Today you will hear many reasons why you should pass SJR 5. I want to focus my remarks on one aspect --- trust in government. Trust in government is a fundamental platform that allows democracy to flourish and is a pre- condition for people's willingness to vote and to support government with their hard earned tax dollars.

People's trust in government is being eroded by the perception that people with the ability to make large contributions have a disproportionate influence over policy- making and budget decisions. This isn't just speculation. In 2012, the Brennan Center at the NYU Law School conducted a national survey about the influence of Super PAC spending on government. Nearly two-thirds of Americans said that they trust government less because big donors to Super PACs have more influence than regular voters.

This survey was cited in a report released this month by the Kettering Institute and the Policy Consensus Initiative at Portland State University. The research for the report was conducted by Wendy Willis, my colleague at the National Policy Consensus Center at PSU. The purpose of the study was to get a better understanding of the current environment in legislatures in order to inform those working to promote more collaborative and democratic governance. The study involved in depth listening sessions with legislators and former legislators in Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Louisiana, Minnesota, Montana, Ohio, and Oregon.

According to the report, there was widespread discussion among legislators about the effect of money in politics. The report stated "there was discussion of campaign finance reform in each of the states ... (and) it was widely agreed that the pressure to raise money compromised both legislators' time and their ability to be seen as fair and impartial."

One final point --- from my perspective as a former state legislator. There are perceived winners and losers in any campaign finance reform effort. Republican and Democratic legislators are reluctant to give up what they perceive as benefits for them from the current system. I understand the pressures. I chaired a sub-committee in the 1989 legislative session on campaign finance reform. The work never went anywhere – killed by partisan pressures. Have courage and take the step that SJR 5 offers you to allow the people of Oregon to decide if giving you the chance to make reforms is a worthy cause for their democracy.