

TESTIMONY
SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 5
APRIL 21, 2015

RICK NORTH

Thank you all for the opportunity to testify in favor of Senate Joint Resolution 5.

My name is Rick North and I'm a resident of Durham, Oregon.

By way of background, I'm the former executive vice president of the Oregon chapter of the American Cancer Society, a position I held from 1993-1998. I also worked for the Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility for over seven years before I retired four years ago. I spent most of my life promoting public health and still do.

I've seen first-hand the harmful effects of big money on government. For years, the Cancer Society, the Lung Association and Heart Association had tried to persuade state legislators to increase Oregon's extremely low cigarette tax. This would persuade thousands of adults to quit smoking and thousands of teenagers to never start. It would directly save thousands of lives and millions of dollars in decreased health care costs.

For years, polls showed the vast majority of Oregonians favored increasing cigarette taxes, but we could never pass a bill because tobacco companies had made sizeable donations to many legislators, who would then block any legislation.

Our only alternative was a ballot initiative, Measure 44, which we did in 1996, raising cigarette taxes 30 cents per pack. We were fortunate to win, in spite of being outspent 6-1 by these very same tobacco companies.

We had to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash and staff time to even give us a fighting chance. In the end, it was money well spent but it could have been used for research that brings us closer to finding the cure for cancer. Later ballot measures in Oregon and other states haven't been so fortunate and hundreds of thousands of dollars were lost completely.

I've found almost all state legislators – whether they agree with me or not on issues – to be very well-intentioned. But I firmly believe that big money in political campaigns is the single biggest threat to our democracy. There's a famous quote from business that I think applies to politics too: **"A bad system will beat a good person every time."** Please help change this system and vote for SJR 5.

Thank you.

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