

Hearing for SJR 5

April 21, 2015

Jennifer Lleras Van Der Haeghen – Western States Center

Chair Rosenbaum, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to come before you all today. My name is Jennifer Lleras Van Der Haeghen, I am a Common Cause board member and the RACE Program Director for Western States Center. I live in Eugene, Oregon in the Santa Clara area near the cross roads of River Road and Wilkes. I am here today to support the passage of Senate Joint Resolution 5. SJR5 which will refer to the voters a constitutional amendment that authorizes the Legislature to set contribution limits is the right thing for Oregon.

At Western States Center we believe that Democracy is the corner stone of a just society. We know that a democracy can only fully function in Oregon and across the nation when every person eligible to participate in the process can. Unlimited contributions undermine our democracy. Unlimited contributions allow an elite few to play, in some cases, deciding roles in the outcomes of elections. With the average Oregon House seat ranking seventh highest in the nation, we cannot in good faith say that our democracy is accessible to every Oregonian.

This is an issue of access and equity. As our states demographics change we have an opportunity continue building a democracy that allows every Oregonian to play a meaningful role in the outcomes of elections. People need to know that when they contribute to a campaign they're not being out spent \$1,000 to one. In Oregon 1 in every 5 people is a person of color. In the last census, 16% of Oregonians are living at or below the poverty line. People of color and low income people have traditionally faced barriers to voting. These traditionally disenfranchised communities in our state see inequity in campaign contributions that are out of their reach. When I've been out knocking doors in Eugene and Portland I hear people say, "Oh my vote doesn't really count. That race has already been decided." They don't believe the vote has happened, they know that there are a select few whose financial contributions create an unlevel playing field. Fueling the perception that leaders listen to .08% of the population that gives over \$2500.

Without campaign contribution limits we are actively diminishing public confidence in a truly representative democracy. The high cost of seeking office in Oregon is not only a potential distraction for policy makers but creating a strong disconnect between constituents and lawmakers. This is why voters overwhelmingly support campaign contribution limits. Please support SJR 5 and make Oregon a place where every person really does have an equal vote.