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SB 75
Senate Rules Committee
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Testimony of Secretary of State Jeanne P. Atkins

Chair Rosenbaum and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to be here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 75, as amended by the -3, and its parallel bill, HB 2178A. Either of these bills would formally begin a critical discussion on campaign finance reform.

As I testified in April, when the committee was kind enough to accept testimony on SJR5 and SB75, the very foundation of our democracy requires public faith in the system of representation and election. Unfortunately, that faith has been seriously eroded by negative public perceptions about the relationship between elected officials and the donors who provide — in some cases — vast sums of money to their campaigns. Seventy-four percent of Oregonians agreed that there should be limits on campaign contributions to candidates for elected office, according to a 2012 survey by Oregon Public Broadcasting and Fox 12. National surveys yield the similar results. A 2013 Gallop poll found that 79% of Americans would support a law that put limits on campaign contributions to U.S. Congressional candidates.

The discussion of those two pieces of legislation in April brought forward a good number of questions and concerns as well as additional ideas and concepts. That's why I believe creating a task force to bring possible solutions to the February 2016 Legislative Session is the best way to move forward on a public policy issue that has eluded resolution for so many years. I think it's also important to say that the task force will begin with a clean slate. This is an opportunity to have an open, wide-ranging conversation with all affected and interested parties.

The job of the task force is to work towards a balanced proposal that addresses the desire of Oregonians to limit the effect of money in politics within the constitutional

boundaries or to recommend appropriate constitutional changes that will be acceptable to voters. We are very sensitive to the enormous value that Oregonians place on free speech. To that end, I will appoint a task force that is inclusive of each major political party, community organizations and nonaffiliated voters from the broader community because any constitutional referral would ultimately need to pass at the ballot box.

I would like to thank Gov. Brown for asking me to lead this important discussion about campaign finance reform. Transparency and accountability of elected officials and candidates are critically important to Oregonians. I look forward to working with Gov. Brown, members of the task force and stakeholders to try and tackle it.

Finally, I'd like to thank the Committee for holding a hearing on SB 75 today, and I am happy to take any questions.

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