



310 SW 4th Ave, Suite 413
Portland, OR 97204
503/283-1922
503/283-1877 (fax)
www.commoncause.org/oregon

Testimony on Senate Joint Resolution 5

Madam Chair, Vice Chair, members of the committee, my name is Daniel Lewkow, and I am the Political Director for Campaign Finance Reform for Common Cause Oregon. Common Cause Oregon supports the passage of Senate Joint Resolution 5.

I would like to thank all those who came here to testify in favor of contribution limits, and to Sens. Monroe, Edwards, Monnes Anderson, and Reps. Helm, Fagan, and Lively who have been major champions of campaign finance reform.

Common Cause is a nonpartisan organization that works to safeguard and improve the democratic process. For more than 40 years, the organization has helped strengthen public participation and faith in our institutions of self-government, and has worked to ensure that government serves and is accountable to the public interest.

In this spirit, Common Cause Oregon is strongly in favor of contribution limits for political campaigns. As you know, because of federal law, we do not currently have the authority to limit contributions to independent expenditures or to measure campaigns. But we absolutely can limit how much a donor can give to a state candidate in an election cycle. This is a major step that we can and need to take for several reasons.

First, we need campaign contribution limits to help lower the cost of campaigns.

A lack of limits is one of the biggest contributors to the high costs of campaigning. Without limits in place, there is nothing that stops a small number of particularly-wealthy donors from pouring hundreds of thousands of dollars into the campaigns of their chosen candidates, thus requiring that their opponents also raise similar amounts of money too.

In Oregon, the average amount that a candidate for the State House had to raise in 2012 was the 7th-highest in the country, according to the National Institute on Money in State Politics. That was more than Florida, New York, and Colorado, which have much larger populations in their House districts. In 2014 elections Oregon was the 15th most expensive in the country¹. While it may be true that our campaigns are not as expensive as Texas and California's races, they are much more expensive than what a state of 3.9 million people needs to be.

¹ National Institute on Money in State Politics- <http://www.followthemoney.org/show-me?y=2014&c-r-ot=S,O,K,J,H,G,D,C#{2}>. Oregon state elections were priced at \$38 million in 2014

The high costs of elections in Oregon makes it harder for a middle-class person to run for office, or even have his or her voice heard in the process. And it means candidates have to spend more and more time raising money.

Second, we need to stop the practice of a very small number of wealthy organizations and donors having-or even appearing to have-a larger voice than everyone else.

In the 2014 gubernatorial campaign, 2/3rds of the money raised by Kitzhaber and Richardson came from just 6% of their donors. That means that the 94% of those who gave to the candidates for governor did not even have half of the voice of the top 6%. That's a major problem.

We need contribution limits to ensure that candidates are not dependent on two or three wealthy donors to finance their entire campaigns. To do this, we need to lower the costs of what it takes to run for office, and put a ceiling on the few exceptionally large contributions.

Finally, we need to give the legislature the tools to be able to protect our elections. Right now, because we do not have the constitutional authority to establish limits, the legislature cannot even make the smallest fixes, like limiting the amount a donor can give during a legislative session. Or limiting what one can give to a candidate for judge. Or ensuring that people who have repeatedly violated campaign finance law are restricted from donating again. It's a problem that we can limit what a lobbyist can spend on a legislator during session, but we cannot limit how much the same lobbyist can give to the same legislator's PAC during session.

Why tie the hands of legislators by not passing SJR 5? Why not give them the ability to even react to what the voters are asking for?

Common Cause Oregon, along with these great legislators, organizations, and your own constituents, are asking the Senate Rules Committee to take a stand, join the people of Oregon, and pass the campaign finance reform that we need. Please support Senate Joint Resolution 5.