

TESTIMONY OF SAL PERALTA
On behalf of the Independent Party of Oregon
SB 1501 & 1599

Sal Peralta
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Chair Williamson and members of the committee,

My name is Sal Peralta. I am testifying on behalf of the Independent Party of Oregon in favor of Senate Bills 1501 and 1599.

Taken together, these bills will “hit the pause button” for one election cycle with regard to how ballot access is calculated for Oregon’s major and minor political parties to prevent several Oregon political parties from losing ballot access as a result of the passage of the state’s new “Motor Voter” law.

Small parties in Oregon are threatened by the passage of Oregon's new voter registration system, which is expected to add more than 400,000, mostly non-affiliated voters into the system prior to the 2016 general election.

Because ballot access for most Oregon political parties is based on their share of the overall electorate at the time of that election, several Oregon political parties including Independent, Working Families, Progressive and Constitution parties are threatened with losing ballot access. Under the previous system, 75 percent of voters joined a political party. Under the Motor Voter system only 9 percent are joining political parties.

This shift is due to changes in how the state processes new voter registrations.

Under the previous system, voters were allowed to select a political party at the Department of Motor Vehicles when they filled out a registration card. Under the new system voters are automatically enrolled without their knowledge as non-affiliated and must return a card within 21 days to either opt-out or be enrolled in a political party.

The net result is an existential threat for the smaller parties that do not have large budgets to conduct voter outreach on a scale that would allow them to maintain ballot access.

However, even the larger, better financed parties like the Democrats and Republicans are significantly affected by this new law. For example, **prior to the passage of Motor Voter, 40 percent of all voters were registered with the Democratic Party. Under Motor Voter, fewer than 5 percent are registering Democratic.**

Our basic position is that no political party in Oregon should be weakened or threatened as a result of the passage of the Motor Voter legislation.

We therefore recommend the passage of both 1501 and 1599 as engrossed.

However, as noted above, that merely buys us one year to more fully address questions of ballot access to the state primary and general election ballots for all of the state's political parties. **In addition to passing this legislation, we also encourage the legislature or the Secretary of State to convene a trans-partisan work group that includes representatives from all of the state's political parties and voting rights experts (Brennan Center, Rose Center, etc) to begin working on recommendations to the 2017 legislature.**

I am also attaching:

- a copy of a petition that was signed by more than 300 people in one day asking the Senate and Governor to pass legislation to prevent the state's "motor voter" law from threatening the ballot access for several of Oregon's political parties.
- A few of the several editorials from various Oregon newspapers (Oregonian, Bulletin, News-Register, et al) that have called on the legislature to ensure that Motor Voter law not harm ballot access for the state's political parties.

Respectfully,

Sal Peralta
Secretary, Independent Party of Oregon