

3/3/2017

5034 SE Belmont St.  
Portland OR 97215

Rep. Jennifer Williamson and  
Members of the House Rules Committee  
Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court Street NE, Room 453  
Salem, Oregon 97301

SUBJECT: HB 2578 (Small Donor Funded Elections)

Dear Chairwoman Williamson and Members of the House Rules Committee:

Thank you for taking the time to conduct a hearing for HB 2578! I was present at the hearing and appreciate the quality of the testimony, questions raised and the bill's design objectives to redress current inequities related to large donor funding mechanisms impacting Oregon's elections.

That large donor contributions impact elections and influence legislator's decision making once elected, is certain. That the voting citizenry are becoming much more aware that their voices are often unheard by politicians distracted with onerous fundraising, is also certain! Your support of HB 2578 and its renewal of Oregon's democracy will be a clear message to voters that you care about their best interests and the integrity of Oregon's elections!

I would like to address a few comments and questions raised by Representative Mike McLane during Tuesday's hearing. Respectfully, I found some of the Representative's stated opposition to the bill to be unfounded and hope that I may shed some light from a voter's viewpoint.

With regard to the Representative's stated concern with "government subsidy of political speak". On the point of public funding of Oregon political campaigns, I see little difference between HB 2578 and Oregon's current political Tax Credit program. Nor do I see any political bias favoring one party over another in the language or intent of the bill. However, providing matching funds in exchange for (voluntary) small donor funded campaigns, as proposed by HB 2578 is a different approach, which runs

counter to the status quo. Indeed, I see this enhancement as a net positive for HB 2578, adding a considerable cost benefit component, when compared with the existing Tax Credit program.

The suggestion that “political speak” is the primary objective of candidates, I believe dilutes an important sentiment established by our founders related to electing representatives “of the people, by the people”. In my view the “people” as candidates were not envisioned as politicians (or fundraisers). Rather, I believe they were perceived to be concerned citizens inspired to represent others on the merits of their solutions in support of their communities and constituents – HB 2578 is one such solution!

On the question of whether small donor campaigns would “push large contributions higher”, I must also express a counter opinion. While it is curious that such a concern would be generated in reference to a bill that is specifically designed to remedy run-away big money donor contributions - my sense is that HB 2578’s maximum public match clause, more than adequately mitigates the concern.

Additionally, if a campaign is a true test of competing ideas, I would suggest no harm exists whatsoever to voters or elections under the proposed voluntary donor program envisioned within HB 2578. I would however expect that if voters should perceive harm by campaigns that may choose unrestrained donations by special interests, the matter shall be effectively sorted by none other than voter’s wishes at the ballot box!

I would also like to comment on the assertion that the Oregon Political Tax Credit (OPTC) program is somehow equivalent to HB 2578 (or even somewhat adequate to the task of its remedies).

Whereas, HB 2578 matches qualified small donor contributions (six to one) with taxpayer investment dollars, the OPTC program offers no such match or incentive. Nor does the OPTC program redress funding inequities or barriers to public office by those with less access to an ever more confined system of economic reward. By affording greater citizenry involvement, HB 2578 offers a wider range of persons and ideas within the halls of discourse. This human potential is essential to meeting ever more complex challenges confronting Oregon.

The overall merits and potential of campaigns that would result by enacting HB 2578, with candidates voluntarily foregoing big-money special interest contributions, should be welcomed by all Oregon Legislators! Affording candidates and incumbents more time to meet and speak directly with constituent groups, is an extraordinary benefit for



both the candidates and voters like me! It is also essential to formulating high quality solutions that better reflect consensus based outcomes for all Oregonians.

While the current Oregon tax credit program is not an integral part of the proposed HB 2578 - The concept of replacing the lesser effective OPTC program and transferring its funding to support an improved program (such as proposed by HB 2578) is a compelling strategy given the State's current budget shortfall.

Finally, if not yet entered into the hearing's public record, I believe it would be beneficial to include the number of written correspondence received by the Rules Committee related to HB 2578.

Thank You Again!

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Stephen Keller", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Stephen Keller