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To: House Committee on Rules, Oregon Legislative Assembly

Re: HB 4076 Misgivings

Dear Chair Williamson, Vice-Chair McLane, and committee members:

I strongly support public funding of political campaigns. However, I have substantial misgivings about HB 4076 in its current form.

Reducing the influence of wealthy donors is a worthwhile goal that I favor, but matching private donations amplifies their power above that of voters. The 6-to-1 match just reduces the cost for private donors to influence elections—at taxpayers' expense.

This bill would magnify the overrepresentation of insiders and incumbents. Finding the hundreds of donors needed to qualify would be easier for those who already have political connections. Incumbent gerrymandering in Oregon already protects low-quality legislators too much. Place of residence is a flawed gauge of competence and integrity.

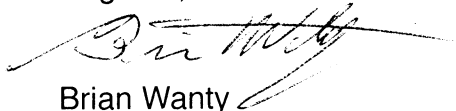
Greatly reducing the match to unopposed candidates is prudent. But, there is no reduction for uncompetitive elections. Typically, 85% of winning legislative candidates get more than 55% of the vote, making the vast majority of contests uncompetitive due to incumbent gerrymandering. Uncompetitive elections are hollow rituals without effect.

Most advanced democracies publicly fund political parties in proportion to their vote share. Public funding is determined by popular support, not private donors. However, political parties are so unpopular in the United States that this approach is not politically feasible until major reforms are enacted that weaken party oligarchies and democratize political parties. The precinct committee person election process is flawed and dated.

Instead, a method is needed that is as similar to funding parties as possible, but is also politically viable. One proposition would be to distribute public funds to general election candidates based on the number of ballots returned by the party's district voters in the primary election. A bounty per vote provides an extra incentive to increase primary election turnout, and democratize parties by expanding their registered voters.

HB 4076 strengthens the power of private donors and skews elections toward incumbents. It diverts attention from the larger crisis of the authoritarian incumbent gerrymandering of Oregon Legislative Assembly districts, which impairs the re-election motive for legislators to respond effectively to public concerns. Follow the money.

Regards,


Brian Wanty