

Dec. 16, 2020

To: Chair Smith Warner and Members of the House Committee on Rules
From: Paloma Sparks, Vice President, Oregon Business & Industry
RE: Campaign Finance

Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on this important issue for Oregon Business & Industry members. OBI is Oregon's most comprehensive business association representing approximately 1,600 businesses that employ nearly 330,000 people.

Oregon has one of the most transparent campaign finance systems in the country. Any citizen can access complete records of who is donating to campaigns and how much they are donating. They can also see how candidates are spending those funds. This system allows candidates to have full control over their own messages and how they communicate with voters.

The campaign finance proposals presented to this committee will drastically change how campaigns in Oregon are run. No longer will candidates have control over their own messages. This will be particularly true if limits are so low that it limits the ability of candidates to meaningfully communicate their message to voters. Independent expenditures will take over as they have in most other states with laws similar to those proposed here.

Any campaign finance law should be fair. They must ensure a level playing field where all donors are treated in the same manner, with the same opportunities and the same limitations. Businesses should be able to engage in campaigns to the same degree as unions. Many other states have established limits on union giving. That should also be the case in Oregon. A law giving preference to "small donor PACs" is exactly the same as a preference for unions, there is no meaningful difference. If the preference is for individual giving, the limits on all organizations should be fair. Past proposals would have created a system where unions were given full access and businesses would have been completely shut out. That would create a fundamentally imbalanced system.

Campaign contribution limitations must be designed to ensure that all candidates can raise adequate money to finance viable campaigns, regardless of party or political philosophy. Challengers must have the means to mount competitive campaigns. Otherwise, the makeup of the legislature will continue to fail to reflect the diversity of backgrounds and views of Oregonians.

Finally, any significant change to how campaigns are funded must also allow for reasonable transition times so that funds in existing accounts may be used for the purposes the donors intended them to be used for. To do otherwise would be an unreasonable burden on voters and candidates who were abiding by laws in place at the time the funds were raised. The new system must allow for time for all participants in giving and spending.

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