

Testimony on Senate Joint Resolution 18

Chair Golden, Chair Williamson, and Members of the Committees,

Good afternoon, for the record my name is Derek Bradley and I am Portland City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty's Policy Director. Commissioner Hardesty was unable to attend today's hearing but asked me to come and deliver testimony on her behalf. In addition to her testimony I will use what time I have remaining to discuss the work I and my old boss Former Representative Greg Matthews did around campaign finance reform.

Chair Golden, Chair Williamson, and Members of the Committees,

I am sorry I am unable to attend this important hearing today. I have been a supporter of campaign finance reform for many years and view allowing contribution limits to be an essential tool in combating the corruptive influence of money in politics. No one is happy with the current system of unlimited donations allowed in Oregon, no one except well moneyed interests hoping to influence public policy. Across all demographics, including party lines there is support for campaign finance reform. Even elected officials who have benefited from the current system rarely think highly of the need to constantly raise money at an ever-increasing scale and pace.

We face serious problems at all levels of government. Oftentimes good ideas are not pursued because they are unpopular with large donors. This has led to delays in addressing problems ranging from climate change, to properly funding our schools, to creating an equitable tax system. For the past three weeks the Oregonian has been detailing how our state's campaign finance laws have caused Oregon to go from a leader in environmental issues to a state that is controlled by special interest money over good policy. This problem exists in too many fields of lawmaking to list in this brief testimony.

There are concerns that have been raised that limiting political contributions will limit people's free speech. But the speech of many is already greatly limited by the unchecked donations of the wealthy and moneyed interests. If someone gives the maximum amount of money allowed to a candidate and feels the need to continue to express their support I would encourage them to volunteer for the campaign, host a house party in support of the candidate, or engage in other forms of communication with voters. It is ridiculous that if someone buys me a \$2 cup of coffee they are somehow unduly influencing me, but if they write my campaign a check for \$20,000 that is viewed as being completely ok. Writing large check after large check to a candidate is not speech, it is bribery.

I have also heard concerns that imposing contribution limits will simply cause contributions to be moved from the coffers of political candidates, which are fairly transparent, to the more shadowy accounts of political action committees. There is some validity to these concerns, which is why it is also important for these committees to seriously consider, and if anything, further strengthen, the two House bills relating to campaign finance disclosure. These bills will help disclose the source of funding for advertisements even when it is not coming from a candidate's campaign. But these concerns also ignore a crucial truth, Oregon routinely has one of the highest per capita costs of elections in the country. This can largely be attributed to the lack of any contribution limits in our races.

Campaign finance is a very difficult and complicated problem to address, matched only by the importance and need to address it. I urge you to not be persuaded by the people who insist that because it is complicated it is impossible to make any meaningful changes to it. We can look at elections in other states and federally to see that contribution limits and disclosure requirements have positive and meaningful impacts on how our elections are conducted. For the sake of our democracy and the people of Oregon I urge your full support of the bills currently before these committees. Thank you for your time.