

May 23, 2019

TO: House Committee on Rules  
FR: Charlie Fisher, State Director, Oregon State Public Interest Research Group (OSPIRG)  
RE: HB 2714 w/ -4 Amendment

OSPIRG strongly supports setting limits on contributions to candidates running for office and commends the committee for taking this issue seriously.

While we think the -4 amendments are a significant improvement over the status quo, we urge you to make the following improvements:

**1) Lower the currently proposed limits in order to make them more in line with what a regular person might be able to afford.**

According to an analysis of campaign finance data from the 2016 election done by OSPIRG Foundation, the average small donor, defined as someone who gave \$250 or less, gave an average of \$129.<sup>i</sup> Under the currently proposed limits for statewide races, which would be \$5,600 between the general and primary elections, someone who gave up to the limit would be giving 44 times the average small donor.

In 2016, there were only 424 donors who gave over \$5,000 to candidates. If those same 424 large donors gave the limit to a statewide candidate that would add up to nearly \$2.4 million, or just about exactly what all 29,479 small donors spent in the 2016 election (\$2.42 million).<sup>ii</sup> From this perspective, while setting limits prevents the extremely high contributions we've seen in recent elections, it still maintains the status quo of a small set of wealthy donors and special interests being able to overmatch regular Oregonians.

**2) Place limits on contributions from political party committees, caucus committees, and federal candidates.**

Contributions from political party committees, caucus committees, and federal candidates are currently unlimited to various other committees. This sets up the potential for large donations to flow through these committees and circumvent the limits. For example, a single wealthy donor could declare to run for federal office and give unlimited amounts of their own money to a political party or caucus committee, which could then pass that through to one or multiple candidates. Limiting contributions from these entities would close this loophole.

**Public Support for Campaign Finance Reform:**

It's no surprise that the vast majority of Oregonians and Americans think that big money is a problem in our politics and it's one that urgently needs to be addressed. A recent national study found that 88% of Americans supported reducing the influence of big campaign donors in elections.<sup>iii</sup> Closer to home, ballot measures in Portland and Multnomah County to limit campaign contributions passed with more than 85% of the vote. And a statewide poll from 2015 found that 75% of Oregonians believe that those without access to networks of wealthy donors face significant barriers to running for office.<sup>iv</sup> In this landscape, you can understand why an

individual might become cynical about the political process entirely and you could certainly understand why they would decide not to make a contribution to a candidate at all because they rightly determine it will be a drop in the bucket when compared to big money.

With all of this being said it's important to note that while contribution limits are a critical component in balancing the scales between regular Oregonians and large donors, they are insufficient by themselves. **Given the urgency and widespread public support for action on this issue, we also urge you to include small donor public financing in any comprehensive campaign finance reform package this session.**

---

<sup>i</sup> [Big Money in Oregon State Elections](#), OSPIRG Foundation, 2018.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iii</sup> [Americans Evaluate Campaign Finance Reform](#), Voice for the People & University of Maryland, 2018.

<sup>iv</sup> [Big Money in Oregon State Elections](#), OSPIRG Foundation, 2018