

March 18, 2021

To: Senate Rules Committee

From: Lee Mercer

RE: Support for SB 261, SB 262, SJR 3 and SJR4 (steps to address the “tyranny of the minority”)

Chair Wagner, Vice Chair Girod and Members of the Senate Rules Committee,

As crowds of armed and angry demonstrators shout about their legal rights— from demanding an end to public health measures to address the Corona pandemic to expressing their right to bear arms without regulation— a frightening trend has developed in America. These groups, often promoting a minority point-of-view, claim to be only asking the government to submit to the “will of the people.”

And indeed, in the democracy of which we are all so proud, it should be the will of the people by which the government is guided in passing and enforcing laws to protect our rights and regulate our behavior. But, in our democratic process, it is the will of the majority, not a vocal minority, which is supposed to be expressed in legislation and policy. **Yet, too often lately, vocal minorities seem to be attempting, and often succeeding, in forcing their will on the rest of us.**

During the current pandemic, governing bodies, from cities to the federal government, have enforced powers under public health and emergency laws to minimize the death and suffering. And yet, with “Don’t Tread On Me” banners and long guns waving, crowds of demonstrators question the government’s right to take public health measures and demand that churches, restaurants and hair salons open immediately. While this vocal minority speaks out, a number of polls indicate between 65 and 80% of Americans oppose opening businesses so fast. Yet, in the face of the protests, nervous governors and legislatures speed up the opening process, potentially at the risk of public health.

This phenomenon— a vocal minority getting its way—is not new. Especially when the minority is supported by influential economic and political interests. While polls indicate a majority of Americans have supported reasonable gun regulations for years, the NRA, and other deep-pocketed interests, keep legislators voting against anything that would quell the epidemic of gun violence in America.

On another issue, a strong majority of Americans, and Oregonians, polled in recent years, support moving to a universal health care system like those enjoyed by the other industrialized nations. But again, the minority arguing for employer-based insurance care, with all its co-pays and deductibles, and backed by health insurers, PHARMA and the medical industrial complex, block us from achieving health care for all.

Meanwhile, in Oregon, in another twist of the tyranny of the minority, a small group of legislators has walked out on two, going on three, successive legislative sessions, blocking critically needed climate change legislation and other of the people’s business supported by a majority of Oregon voters, and sabotaging most of the 2020 session bills.

So perhaps it is time for the majority of Oregonians— and all Americans— **to stand up against the tyranny of the minority.** A majority of Americans and Oregonians support government addressing public health emergencies, passing prudent regulations on firearms, providing universal healthcare and bold action to address the climate change crisis.

Let’s stop allowing the tyranny of the minority, sometimes in partnership with deep pocketed special interests, from blocking our democracy from functioning as it should to express the people’s will.

Please support SB 261, SB 262, SJR 3 and SJR4 all prudent steps towards addressing this tyranny of the minority. Thanks for your time and consideration in this matter.

Respectfully yours,

Lee Mercer

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