



The League of Women Voters of Oregon is a 101-year-old grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We envision informed Oregonians participating in a fully accessible, responsive, and transparent government to achieve the common good. LWVOR Legislative Action is based on advocacy positions formed through studies and member consensus. The League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party.

March 18, 2021

To: [Senator Rob Wagner](#), Chair
[Senate Committee On Rules](#)

Re: [SB 261](#) – Bars use of campaign funds to pay fines etc. – **Comment**
[SJR 4](#) – Referral to voters for constitutional change on legislative quorum – **Comment**

The League of Women Voters encourages *informed* and *meaningful* participation in government. We Make Democracy Work, from women’s suffrage more than a century ago, to legislative action across the spectrum today, including the 2020 decennial US redistricting, affecting Oregon. These bills address Oregon’s legacy of legislative walkouts, used as dissension for specific issues to halt progress on all legislation, including decisions needed for unrelated critical, urgent issues.

- SB 261 would bar asking for or using campaign contributions to pay legal fees, fines, or other expenses related to unexcused absences.
- SJR 4 calls for a referendum to amend the Oregon Constitution to change Oregon’s unusual (high) quorum requirement to a simple majority vote.

[SJR 4](#) is simple and effective, to let the voters decide: Shall we replace the Constitution’s “two-thirds” quorum requirement with “a majority”, or continue to require a *supermajority quorum* for Legislative action? The Legislature cannot act without a quorum, as stated in the original Oregon Constitution, on achieving statehood in 1859¹. Only Indiana, Texas, and Tennessee have legislative quorum requirements this high – two-thirds. This change would let a majority act.

[SB 261](#) would protect the integrity of funds collected by legislators for political purposes, not allowing those funds to be used to mitigate the effect of sanctions imposed for unexcused absence. This is consistent with the League’s support of campaign finance laws that are strict, limited, and effective in regulating the use of money in politics. Allowing elected officials access to campaign coffers to offset sanctions for work absences would defeat the purpose of donors in contributing those funds.

Legislative walkouts in Oregon are not new and have been used on both sides of the aisle. In 2001, the party in the minority then, now the majority party, walked out in protest over the majority party’s Congressional redistricting. This is continued misuse of a defective tool by both major parties in the legislature because walkouts halt the people’s business.

Thank you for allowing the League to comment on our state legislature’s effective functioning. We are eager to work with the legislature to find and implement common sense reforms so the Oregon Legislative Assembly can perform its Constitutional function.

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1. https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bills_laws/Pages/OrConst.aspx; opening paragraph.
2. LWVOR’s 2021 Issues for Action, p. 7: “The League supports measures to “improve methods of financing political campaigns in order to ensure the public's right to know, combat corruption and undue influence, enable candidates to compete more equitably for public office and promote citizen participation in the political process.”