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On Behalf Of: Left Libertarian Policy Institute
Committee: House Committee On Rules
Measure: HJR201

The Left Libertarian Policy Institute is a think tank dedicated to advancing public policies that stress social equality and good governance within a Libertarian framework.

This bill proposes a statewide special property tax restricted to "public safety," and it will be pitched to the voters as funding wildfire prevention. Other states have tried this before, and such policies have not translated into improved public services.

In 1993, Californians passed Prop 172, a statewide half-cent sales tax restricted to "public safety." Voters were led to believe it would end California's then-perceived crime epidemic. In reality, no net new public services were created from the new tax. It simply enabled wasteful spending in the general fund caused by ballooning public pensions, and I do not think anyone could look at California today and call it a crime-free utopia. Californians quickly discovered the vague term "public safety" can be creatively interpreted by the courts, as will happen here in Oregon should this measure pass. Special taxes are bad governance. We saw this with the Portland arts tax, which was intended to fund public school arts education. Instead of creating new programs, Portland Public Schools simply cut their own arts programs from the general fund. Surely there is some room to make cuts to programs in Oregon's \$25,000,000,000.00 general fund to fund whatever glistening "public safety" needs that will be promised to the voters and never delivered.

Oregon's tax effectiveness is an example of the whole not being more than the sum of its parts. In Portland, the parks department is claiming a budget crisis at the same time the "Clean Energy" Fund is sitting on top of a \$450,000,000 surplus and taxpayers are funding a huge Oregon Metro parks bond program for parks they cannot even enjoy, per a scathing audit. The toothless and inept Tax Conservation and Coordination Commission has done nothing to actually coordinate local and regional tax levies. The answer to funding Oregon's public safety needs is not to just pass yet another special tax like affixing a new layer of bandaids over an infected wound.

Just last year, the Governor met with Portland business leaders and made a promise of a 3-year new tax moratorium. When governments break promises by considering this bill, it creates a harsh and risky business environment. Oregon's corporate activity tax (a sales tax on steroids) is causing businesses to leave the state, and this will be more of the same.

