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On Behalf Of:
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Measure: HB4024

This system cements party loyalty. When caucus members take a stand against their party, they risk losing support in the next election. I stopped attending House Democratic Caucus meetings in the summer of 2021, when I received a legal opinion indicating that our meetings violated Oregon's open meetings law. But I kept my decision to myself until after I was gerrymandered out of my seat and could not continue in the Legislature. Whether you call my delay cowardice or pragmatism, the reality is that unlimited donations from party institutions require loyalty to the party over loyalty to the voters and sometimes even the law. By refusing to break Oregon's open meetings laws, I effectively cut myself off from a significant portion of the potential funding for any future campaign.

Independent Expenditures. If large donors can no longer move huge sums of money into campaigns, they will spend it on independent expenditures. As these expenditures are not coordinated with campaigns, they are often used to fuel negative campaigning (or to respond to it). As an example, when Senator Jeff Golden refused to take large donors' money in his campaign, outside groups nevertheless spent that money to support his candidacy.

It is not a zero-sum game, however. Candidates receive preferential rates for television and radio ads, which are often one-third to one-half the price of independent expenditures. So, while critics of campaign finance reform are correct in claiming that caps would push money into independent expenditures, these expenditures would have less bang for the buck. It is for this reason that large donors do not want campaign contribution caps - caps significantly reduce donors' ability to influence the public through spending.

Looking to the Future. Where does this leave us? The Legislature is currently struggling to write a campaign contribution caps law. While we might see this as a laudable effort on the surface, the reality is that they are capping only individual donations, while preserving exceptions that allow unions, corporations, and caucuses to move unlimited amounts. Despite Oregonians' clear desire to limit the influence that corporations and other large donors have on politics, the Legislature is trying to increase their influence even further, to the detriment of voters and small donors. This attempt to claim virtue while committing vice is the pinnacle of cynicism in a business already known for its hypocrisy.