



OREGON
ASSOCIATION OF
NURSERIES

**Testimony before House Committee on Rules
House Bill 4024 - Relating to Campaign Finance**

By Jeff Stone, Executive Director, Oregon Association of Nurseries
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Chair Fahey, Vice-Chairs Kropf and Helfrich, members of the committee, my name is Jeff Stone and I serve as the Executive Director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries. It is my hope that my comments are construed as constructive related to the important issue of campaign finance reform in the State of Oregon.

Background on the Nursery and Greenhouse Industry

What we are: The nursery and greenhouse industry is the state's largest agricultural sector, with over \$1.37 billion in sales across the nation and the globe. Nationally, Oregon ranks third in nursery production. **Traded Sector:** Nearly 80% of the nursery stock grown in our state leaves our borders – with over 50% reaching markets east of the Mississippi River. **By the numbers:** #1 in US: sales of conifers, shade trees, Christmas trees, and flowering trees. \$443.2 million in annual payroll - \$44,108 average annual pay. We send ecologically friendly, carbon sequestering, green products out of the state, and we bring traded sector dollars back to Oregon. **Who we are:** Nursery association members represent wholesale plant growers, Christmas tree growers, retailers, and greenhouse operators. Our members are located throughout the state, with our largest nursery growing operations found in Clackamas, Marion, Washington, Yamhill, and Multnomah Counties.

Agricultural Operations are Made of up Family Farms

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) recently announced the results of the 2022 Census of Agriculture, spanning more than 6 million data points about America's farms and ranches and the people who operate them down to the county level. The information collected directly from producers shows a continued decline in the total number of U.S. farms. Family-owned and operated farms accounted for 95% of all U.S. farms and operated 84% of land in farms. Oregon is no different, the nursery industry is blessed to have multi-generational operations providing jobs and carbon sequestering green goods.

Seek Compromise and Avoid Legislating by Campaign Initiative

The OAN is comprised of family operations that span the political spectrum. As such, the Association itself is an amalgamation of its membership and urges direct involvement in their community and in our electoral process. My members are able to raise their voice and fund priorities to the issues that fundamentally impact their ability to do business in the state.

While the discussion at the recent House Committee on Rules had a plethora of passion displayed, it is our view that this issue should be resolved by the legislature. Policy by initiative is a poor way of decision making. The Association has been on both sides of initiative petitions and urges the legislature to take action before millions of dollars are spent on competing and conflicting visions of campaign finance reform.

A Couple of Guiding Principles

There are two guiding principles that guide my comments to you today.

1. Leveling the playing field so no one interest group has a structural advantage in the election process is a good policy. There is a growing gap between haves and have not in campaign funding and IP 9 would calcify that gap.
2. When a compromise is brokered between business and union voices, that compromise should be given weighty consideration.

I would like to echo a few points raised by Oregon Business & Industry

- The proposal also recognizes constitutionally protected speech by employers, nonprofits and other entities, while ensuring that no single donor can drown out the voices of others. We specifically appreciate that the bill allows for small businesses, many of which play an integral role in their communities, to continue to participate in our democracy and we firmly oppose any efforts to silence their voices.
- The amendment expands on Oregon's longstanding commitment to transparency in elections by introducing new disclosure requirements for independent expenditures and by finally modernizing and enhancing the ORESTAR campaign finance reporting system and website.
- We recognize that today's discussion is just a starting point and that subsequent amendments are likely to further improve the amendment before you today. In any case, we implore you to take action this legislative session to adopt a campaign finance reform system that is fair, constitutional, transparent, and prioritizes candidates' ability to maintain control over their own voices.

Please give HB 4024 Every Consideration

Small businesses such as the members of the OAN play an integral role in their communities, and we want to encourage them to participate in our democracy. We firmly oppose any effort to silence their voices. There is a growing gap between the haves and have nots in campaigns, and HB 4024 with the -3 amendment levels the playing field for both donors and candidates. It ensures that no single donor can drown out the voices of

others. This agreement halts the infinite escalation of campaign spending, while recognizing and preserving the constitutionally protected speech of voters, employers, nonprofits and other entities. The amendment expands on Oregon's longstanding commitment to transparency in elections by introducing new disclosure requirements for independent expenditures and by finally modernizing and enhancing the ORESTAR campaign finance reporting system and website. In any case, we urge you to seize the moment and adopt a campaign finance reform system that is fair, constitutional, transparent, and prioritizes candidates' ability to maintain control over their own voices.

Thank you for your attention to our comments. We will continue to participate as a good faith stakeholder to achieve a balance between good policy