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| Submitter: | Andrew Kaza |
| On Behalf Of: | IPO |
| Committee: | House Committee On Rules |
| Measure, Appointment or Topic: | HB3166 |

To the esteemed Chair and members of the House Rules Committee:

Thank you to Reps Lively and Evans for acting as Chief Co-Sponsors of HB 3166-2. The Unified Primary Act is a reform LONG overdue in Oregon.

I write to you as a 65-year-old native Oregonian and both as regular citizen and resident of Redmond Oregon but also as a Co-Chair of the Independent Party of Oregon. I have borne witness to - and been proudly associated with - many Oregon "innovations" over the years, be it decriminalizing marijuana or the ground-breaking land use laws of the '70s, to vote by mail and Death with Dignity in the 1990s. Yes, my home state has been unique and progressive in so many ways. Sadly, election reform is not one of those.

While our West Coast neighbors in California, Washington and Alaska have ALL reformed their primary voting systems in the past couple of decades, Oregon has stayed stubbornly in the past, with a closed primary system that effectively silences roughly half (or more) of the voting population during crucial May elections. Not only are we disenfranching the hundreds of thousands of Non-Affiliated Voters (not to mention the tens of thousands of minor party voters, such as our own IPO), but we are actively discouraging democracy by telling them they matter LESS than their citizen counterparts who choose to register with one of the major parties.

Fifty years ago, when Democrats and Republicans were close to three-quarters of the registered voters in our state, this was an annoying "bug" of our closed primary system, but today it's an absolute travesty. On what basis, do the major parties continue to justify this behavior? When over half of people under the age of 30, plus a similar percentage of other major voting blocs such as Hispanic voters, have no say in the May primary process, we are sending a serious message to them that "we don't care," and that's a DANGEROUS example for apathy from the body politic to the citizenry at large.

These days, we need MORE engagement and MORE informed citizenry, not less. It's perhaps the only way to overcome our divisions, create some unity as Oregonians and move forward in a positive fashion towards keeping our fair state at the forefront of good governance in the 21st century.

As noted by others, HB 3166-2 is as notable for what it doesn't do, as what it will do. Unliked some of our Pacific state brethren, this does NOT create a "jungle primary"

along the lines of California, or negate the possibilities of party selections as with several of our neighbors. It does not institute ranked choice voting, which Oregonians roundly rejected in the November elections. Instead, it aims to take the "best of all worlds" and in trailing our neighbors to fixing the problem, the silver lining just might be in perfecting the approach to opening up our primary.

It is time to end the antiquated practice of urging Oregonians to "switch up" their party affiliations every spring in order to momentarily back a candidate of their choice, for fear that their voice will not otherwise be heard. As all of the political parties seek to remain relevant and representative of the people, it would be a massive mistake to discount the participation of the one-third plus Oregonians who choose to remain independent (small i) of the two party system.

And needless to say, if we desire a less-polarized, less extreme political paradigm in the future, allowing ALL Oregonians into the system is among the very best ways to achieve this. So please support HB 3166-2 and send it to the full House for a due and full consideration.

Thank you again to the Rules Committe for your initial consideration. All the best through the remainder of this Legislative session!