On behalf of Common Ground – United We Stand, I am writing to voice strong support for the Oregon Election Reform Coalition's (OERC) proposed Unified Primary measure, HB-3166(-2).

Common Ground – United We Stand is a non-partisan coalition of current and former state legislators focused on supporting state legislatures and effective governance in which people are represented and their voices are heard and incorporated into the public policy process.

Simply put, this is the right bill, at the right time, for Oregon. The chaotic national political environment has filled many people with dread, fear, and anger. In all probability, the impending constitutional challenges will force the Judicial Branch to define the Executive Branch's boundaries and what authority and responsibilities the Legislative Branch can abdicate, either officially or unofficially, to the Executive Branch. The integrity and resiliency of our tripartite system of co-equal branches will face intense and sustained pressure.

I do not think it is a hyperbole to state the continuation of our "democratic experiment" as we know it will be decided during the next four years. Maintaining our democratic republic or transitioning to an authoritarian government hinges on what voters decide. States are the bulwark protecting people from oscillating national political passions. States provide legal protections and deliver services to people at an individual level. After all, state legislators represent their family, friends, and communities – people they live and work with.

Oregonians are fairly inelastic voters; Democrats vote for Democrats and Republicans vote for Republicans. Geographically, all the Republican districts are represented by Republicans, and Democratic districts by Democrats, leaving only a few contested purple districts. This bill will not change those facts. What this bill does is provide voters with *a meaningful opportunity to choose who will represent and advocate for them.*

Our current closed primary system results in the most Republican-Republican running against the most Democrat-Democrat in the general election and the party representing the district remains unchanged. But candidates that pass party purity tests may not be the overall preferred option. Countless Oregonians feel that neither major party represents them. They feel rudderless, adrift in a bifurcated political world – with neither party being an attractive destination. While other voters comprise the exhausted majority, people whose political disengagement is the intended consequence of the continuous mis/disinformation campaign, frenetic policy swings, and constant tumult.

Our current election system denies the approximately 1.1 million unaffiliated Oregon voters and 200,000 minor party members a meaningful opportunity to voice their preference for who represents and advocates for them, while the exhausted majority have succumbed to the political machinations and opted to focus on other aspects of their lives. The resulting effect is the same for each group, non-participation, although for different reasons. The opportunity to meaningfully engage in elections is the seed by which all other democratic processes sprout.

Enacting the Unified Primary fixes our antiquated election system initially created to empower *parties* by adapting to our present realities through providing opportunities for *people* to engage and be re-energized.

Minor parties retain the ability to hold their own nominating process, but yes, the incumbent major party will likely have a candidate elected, but wouldn't it be nice for Oregonians to choose which Democrat or which Republican? Afterall, not all Democrats are the same, and neither are Republicans. As citizen legislators, each brings varied personal and professional experiences to the position, different levels of community engagement, and writing and public speaking skills. If they represent <u>us</u> at a personal level, shouldn't <u>we</u> be able to choose them at a personal level?

Members of the House Rules Committee and members of the Legislature, there is certainly no time like the present to ensure people have a meaningful opportunity to have their voices heard. It is time that we re-ground our government in the voices of people, people whose lives are directly impacted by decisions the State Legislature makes (or doesn't make). Enacting the <u>Unified Primary</u> is one tangible step towards protecting and serving people, at a time when those protections are truly needed.

I sincerely thank you for your time and consideration.

Charlie Conrad

Former State Representative
Co-founder: Common Ground – United We Stand.