March 19th, 2025

RE: VETERANS FOR ALL VOTERS - SUPPORT FOR OREGON HB 3166-2

Oregon House Rules Committee

Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Eric Bronner. I am a Navy Veteran and the Founder and Chief Operating Officer at Veterans for All Voters – a nonpartisan, nonprofit community of over 5000 Veterans and supporters from across the country and across the political spectrum. Our mission is to mobilize military veterans to advocate for election innovations that unlock competition, make our politics less polarizing and our government more representative and responsible.

Veterans for All Voters strongly supports the "Unified Primary Act," Oregon House Bill 3166-2 as the most impactful way to improve voter turnout, decrease polarization and ensure a broader set of Oregonians chooses all of your state's representatives.

Personally, I am one of the 55% of post-9/11 Veterans who does not identify as a Republican or Democrat[1]. In fact, I have never joined any political party. In 2023, over 230,000 Veterans lived in Oregon. This means that, conservatively, over 115,000 Oregon Veterans cannot fully participate in the public primary elections that their taxes help fund. Even worse, these non-affiliated Veteran voters who helped defend our democracy abroad cannot vote in the most consequential elections in their home state.

Thomas Paine said, "The right to vote is the right upon which all other rights depend." Depriving over 1.3 Million nonaffiliated Oregon Voters of their fundamental right to vote in their own, taxpayer-funded primary elections is unconscionable. Depriving Oregon Veterans of this primary right which they fought to defend is inexcusable and shameful.

People say to me all the time, "Stop complaining and just join a party and you can vote in primaries." To which I respond, "I'll consider that if you can tell me one other fundamental right that we *require* citizens to join a private organization in order to exercise that right"? Closed primary elections are the biggest form of (well-accepted) voter suppression in our country. No private organization should impede voters from fully participating in public elections.

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[1] Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) Survey, Oct. 30, 2024 – https://iava.org/media/iava-surveyed-members-in-run-up-to-the-general-election-here-are-the-results

To my pro-democracy friends serving in the Oregon Legislature, please put your words into action. You cannot reasonably claim to be pro-democracy while tolerating the disenfranchisement of 1.3 Million nonaffiliated voters in your state. In Oregon, and nationwide, nonaffiliated (Independent) voters are younger, more racially diverse and include more Veterans than the general voting population. If you believe that higher voter turnout is important, and if you would like to see more voting participation from underrepresented groups then you must support HB 3166-2.

Right now, our country desperately needs more healthy electoral competition on a level playing field. We do not need more partisan extremism; we need less. We do not need more polarization; we need less. Oregon has an opportunity to create a new, more open, inclusive and competitive election system where all voters, and all Oregon Veterans, can fully participate.

Please join Veterans for All Voters and support the Unified Primary Act (HB 3166-2). Together, we can build the more representative and responsive democracy that we all want and deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration

/s/ Eric H. Bronner

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