

Submitter: Andrew Kaza
On Behalf Of: Independent Party of Oregon
Committee: House Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HJR201

To Rep Javadi, Rep Evans, Sen Golden, Rep Watanabe, Sen Sollman, et al on the Rules Committee:

I write to you today in support of HJR 201. My name is Andrew Kaza, and I am a resident of Redmond Oregon and Co-Chair of the Independent Party of Oregon, which strongly supports these refined efforts to bring Open Primaries to the state of Oregon. I am also the Co-Chief Petitioner, along with former Governor Ted Kulongoski and former State Rep. Cheri Helt, to bring these reforms to our fair state through the initiative petition process, contained in IP-55 and IP-56.

We would dearly love to see Salem have the wisdom to bring these reforms forward WITHOUT the need for a long and drawn out initiative petition process. Legislators need to pay attention to the will of the people. Some recent political history in my home county of Deschutes might emphasize the point.

Here in Deschutes County, there was an obvious need for reforms at the local level. But our County Commissioners resisted them until the voters forced it upon them. In 2022, I was a co-chief petitioner within our county for a successful effort to turn our partisan Commissioner offices into non-partisan roles. This only came after many years of tone-deaf reactions from the sitting Commissioners, who could have referred it to the voters themselves at any time. It passed with an overwhelming majority. Two years later, in a similar scenario, the Commission was expanded from three to five members after a successful local petitioning effort.

Both of these measures passed with well over 60% of the vote, indicating strong support within our county. Sadly, our Commissioners were not listening but eventually had "the will of the people" imposed upon them.

I foresee a similar situation with Open Primaries in Oregon. We already know that Oregon severely lags its Pacific Coast neighbors in Alaska, Washington and California, all of which have some form of an Open Primary system. Why has Oregon resisted for so long? It is seemingly antithetical to our modern political history of embracing strong democratic reforms.

With a plurality of Oregon registered voters now being SHUT OUT of our state's closed primary system, the economic reality of this is grievous. The people understand that taxpayer funded elections should enable the rights of ALL voters to participate. Yet, the state continues to subsidize the closed party primaries of the

Democratic and Republican parties to the tune of millions of dollars every year, even as it shuts out the 40%+ of non-affiliated voters or those from third parties such as the Independent Party of Oregon.

This injustice cannot be sustained - and indeed, it won't be.

If legislators fail to pass meaningful reform, I, along with my co-chief petitioners, will press ahead with our plan to bring this to the people directly. And we will prevail. But it would represent another gross dereliction of duty on the part of legislators if that should come to pass.

To be clear, HJR 201 as it stands is not perfect. We propose amending it to mirror the language of our IP-55, for without more precise language, Oregon risks repeating the errors of some approaches made to open the primary process elsewhere.

But we urge the Rules Committee to make these changes and approve sending the bill on to the House and Senate for approval this year. This is a sensible, bi-partisan reform that should help galvanize participation in our democracy, reduce the tensions in our polarized political world and is a no-brainer decision against the landscape of more complicated issues such as our state's current budget crisis and transportation woes.

In short, dear legislators, TAKE THE WIN and pass this resolution and send it to the full bodies for passage and approval into law this year. Or be remembered for another missed opportunity that forced our citizens to take action into their own hands. The choice is yours.

Respectfully submitted -

Andrew Kaza
Co-Chair Independent Party of OR