

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HJR 201

House Committee on Rules

Submitted by Rob Harris

Chair and Majority Leader Representative Ben Bowman,
Vice Chair Representative Hai Pham,
And Distinguished Members of the House Committee on Rules:

My name is Rob Harris. I serve as President of the Hillsboro City Council and am a retired attorney. For over a decade, I have been actively engaged in election reform efforts and was involved in the early development of the proposal now before you.

Over the past twelve years, I have carefully considered, supported, and proposed several election reform initiatives. My overarching goal was to increase voter participation and engagement while expanding the choices available to voters. I viewed our closed primary system as a barrier to participation and believed that political parties protected it primarily for their own institutional interests.

Several years ago, my perspective evolved in important ways. First, I reevaluated my understanding of the role of political parties. I came to recognize that parties serve other crucial functions in voter education, signaling for less active voters, and democratic participation and that role must be protected in any election reform proposal. Second, I recognized that third parties can provide voters with a meaningful mechanism to communicate their priorities to elected officials and we needed to find ways for that to continue without forcing third party voters to “waste” their votes. Third, I became increasingly concerned about the impact of sophisticated technology used in redistricting to create ever more safe districts. This development underscored the importance of creating more opportunities for aspiring candidates within the dominant party in each district as a key feature of our electoral architecture. Fourth, I concluded that any viable election reform must preserve the one-person, one-vote principle that voters understand and trust.

The proposal before you today addresses each of these critical considerations:

Equal Voting Rights: All voters will cast ballots of equal weight in every election regardless of party affiliation. This fundamental principle of democracy remains intact.

Increased Voter Engagement: All voters will receive complete ballots for all races and candidates, can vote in every race so will have the opportunity and reason to become more actively engaged in the political process. Candidates will be incentivized to reach out to and listen to more (not necessarily all) voters not merely those registered with their own party.

Protection of Party Rights: Political parties can safeguard their endorsements from bad-faith actors seeking to hijack party nominations. Parties will retain the authority to develop their own endorsement processes as they see fit.

Flexibility for Minor Parties: Minor parties can choose to opt out of this process to protect their ballot position in the general election. Alternatively, they can opt in, enabling their voters to signal their priorities to the top two advancing candidates. Then consider endorsing one of those two candidates in November. This reduces “wasted” voting.

More Competitive Districts: In districts dominated by a single party, the traditional outcome has been one Democrat and one Republican advancing to the general election, leaving voters with limited meaningful choice. Under this proposal, many districts may see two Democrats or two Republicans advancing to November. This provides all general election voters with two viable choices rather than a predetermined outcome. While this may create uncertainty for some incumbents, it appropriately expands the number of viable paths to elected office and increases democratic accountability.

Preservation of One-Person, One-Vote: This proposal maintains the traditional voting structure that voters understand and support.

I am not aware of any other proposal that delivers such significant benefits to voters while preserving the essential features of our current electoral system. This legislation represents an opportunity to strengthen and modernize our democratic processes in a manner that is both incremental and transformative. HJR 201 positions Oregon as a national leader in viable, practical election reform.

I respectfully urge the committee to support HJR 201 and send it to Oregon Voters. This is the reform we should be voting on.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Rob Harris
Hillsboro Oregon