

The League of Women Voters of Oregon, established in 1920, is a grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We envision informed Oregonians participating in a fully accessible, responsive, and transparent government to achieve the common good. LWVOR Legislative Action is based on advocacy positions formed through studies and member consensus. The League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party.

Date: February 5, 2026

To: [Rep Ben Bowman](#), Chair, and [Rep Lucetta Elmer](#) and [Rep. Hai Pham](#), Vice-chairs

House Committee on Rules

Re: [HJR 201](#) - Proposing Top Two Open Primaries amendment to Oregon Constitution - **Neutral**

The League of Women Voters of Oregon (LWVOR) has a position that strongly supports having primary elections in which all candidates run on the same ballot, and all voters vote that ballot. The need for an ‘open primary’ clearly increases as the number of registered voters in Oregon who declare themselves non-affiliated rises. HJR 201 would accomplish that goal (as long as major parties do not remove themselves from the system as the bill allows).

Yet, the LWVOR remains neutral on this particular bill; which is similar to versions twice rejected by Oregon voters. The League has a position against what is commonly referred to as the “Top Two” election method, in part because it can result in two candidates from the same party being nominated to a general election, as has been seen in Washington State and California. In some areas, due to severe ‘vote splitting,’ the two on the general ballot have been from the opposite party of the area’s major party population. When the final candidates are two of the same party, whether they represent the norm of the community’s registration status or the district’s minority viewpoint, it is a concern. Voters can be dismayed and feel they have no representative option on the general ballot.

Even if we were to nominate 4 or 5 candidates, we could still risk poorer representative outcomes without a system reform such as Ranked Choice Voting (RCV). The Alaska system mentioned in the hearing to support HJR 201 is not actually a Top Two plan. It is a “Final Four” system that advances four candidates to the general ballot and then applies RCV to determine the ultimate winner. It has elected Democrats and Republicans alike. While legislators may be hesitant to consider RCV due to the recent measure for statewide offices being rejected, it should be noted that the ballot measure **failed to include Open Primaries and failed to include legislative offices**. Both points were found lacking by voters.

Supporters of HJR 201 testified that this does not need to be a Top Two system since the bill reads ...“The two candidates for each office receiving the most votes are nominated to the general election, *except as provided by law for the advancement of more than two candidates for an office.*” We fear that once adopted, such an inferior method would not easily be changed to accommodate the aforementioned advancements.

We understand the concept of not allowing the “perfect to be the enemy of the good,” and **we recognize open primaries as a needed (and long overdue) “good.”** However, the LWVOR would strongly encourage amendments that address some of the *inevitable* problems noted above. Both the states of Maine and Alaska have such systems to serve as models. **Take this opportunity to avoid future issues and consider more inclusive amendments to HJR 201.** We would be strong supporters of such a bill.

Currently, we remain neutral on HRJ 201 and thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation and possible amendments.



Barbara Klein,
Acting President, LWVOR



Chris Cobey,
Governance Co-Coordinator, LWVOR