

HJR 201 Would Benefit from a Little Refinement

A constitutional amendment on elections should set parameters or sideboards. It should define what rights cannot be infringed. The details on how to implement the election amendment should fall to the Legislature to create within those sideboards through public input and debate. Too many details in the amendment itself only serve as targets for opponents to identify flaws and lead to confusion and doubt. When in doubt, voters tend to vote No. By adhering to the KIS principle-Keep It Simple, voters are more likely to approve a Constitutional amendment that is easy to understand.

I prefer the name “Inclusion Primary” over the ‘Open Primary’ label. The goal should be to allow all registered voters in the state an opportunity to participate both as candidates and as voters. HJR 201 should be amended and narrowed to establishing the core principle of inclusion.

As drafted, HJR allows the over one million Oregonians registered as unaffiliated with any party the opportunity to vote in the state’s primary nominating election. That is a positive action. It falls short, however, by allowing those voters to be only spectators and not participants. It should also allow those one million people an opportunity to run for the respective offices themselves. You should not have to affiliate with a party to seek elected office in a state-run primary nominating election. It is like relegating those people to half citizenship.

The amendment should also leave to the Legislature the decision on how many candidates receiving the highest number of votes will advance to the General Election. There are numerous ways to evaluate this and establishing a hard number in the Constitution is unwise.

The Dash-1 amendment also does not confine access to the General Election ballot solely to those who advance from the state primary nominating election. The Legislature through statute may enact other means for candidates to qualify for the General Election ballot as it does now.

Oregonians are ready for an election process that gives every voter the right to participate. HJR 201 is a good start. Sanding and buffing would help its chances to shine.

Rick Metsger

Salem, Oregon

