

Submitter:

Mitchel Olson

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

House Committee On Rules

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

HJR201

Good morning, Oregon State Legislators,

I don't often take the opportunity at 6:00 AM on a Saturday to write my legislators, but today the topic is important enough that I find myself doing exactly that.

My past experiences inform my passions. I have seen the results of intentionally limited choices for voters as I walked the streets of a South American country. I was there when a neighboring nation suffered the abandonment of some of their last remaining democratic norms, resulting in Chavez grasping more power not only from the opposition but also, ultimately, from the people. I spent four years as a Chinese linguist, employed by the US Navy and working for the National Security Agency. I focused all of my work on an aggressive and powerful adversarial nation, their politics, and the tactics they employ to undermine our democracy here at home. And I've watched with dismay as the norms, institutions, and unspoken rules that kept my nation great for centuries before were slowly dismantled at the state and federal levels; as they were chipped away at by both parties who have trading long-term stability for short-term gain, and just like Venezuela, ultimately at the expense of those they serve.

At this point in my life I've stopped believing that meaningful change towards more stable democratic practices will come from the top, from the federal level. I now believe our best chances of success exist in county and state elections and legislation, from a ground-up approach, and from a more unified and involved electorate. I believe this law might be part of that hope. As an unregistered voter who cares deeply about principles I find on both sides of the aisle I'm devoted to the notion of being involved in multiple primaries. Why should I be limited to influencing candidates chosen on one side of the political spectrum in May when I'm still not entirely certain who on either side I could be voting for in November? More than half of my fellow veterans nationwide do not affiliate with either party. Why should their influence be curtailed?

I appreciate the time and attention to reading these words, and that I have a voice that might guide, to even the smallest degree, the course of the government of the state in which I live. The unique privilege that is, in the course of all human history, is not lost on me. I also appreciate the efforts of all elected officials, people who do difficult work and have convictions just as deep as my own. But ultimately my faith and my trust is in the people. This legislation gives more choice, more power, and more influence to us; to the people. Supporting that strengthens democracy in

Oregon, sends the message that our elected leaders are not fearful of additional power for the public, and could be a model for other states to follow suit.

Thank you for your time.