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LIMITING CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS: IN SUPPORT OF SB336

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Oregon is one of the few states in the US that has no restrictions on campaign funding, as a result of court rulings on the Oregon state constitution. The amendment of that constitution through referendum in 2020 now allows the state legislature to address this deficit, and it is important that this be done as soon as possible.

Why? Obviously, one reason is because of the power of money through campaign contributions to affect legislation to the benefit of moneyed special interests. The Oregonian newspaper's 2019 series, "Polluted by Money" is one example of many, in Oregon and throughout the country. So, one objective of a bill to limit campaign spending should be to keep the level of specific donations to a limit too low to have substantial influence on a legislator's position or vote on particular topics. For similar reasons, it is also important to ensure that large donations are made publicly, so that the public can observe such influences at work. Limits should not be too low to allow effective campaigns, but they should strongly inhibit special interests from diverting legislators from advancing public welfare.

But there are other reasons to limit campaign funding as well. One is to encourage candidates who don't have backing from moneyed interests to compete for office; clearly, money enables candidates to get their message out more effectively, and contribution limits would help to level the playing field. Another, related reason is to encourage candidates to seek funding from ordinary, like-minded constituents, though direct communication rather than "dialing for dollars" and linking with sources of big money. In this way, we will encourage greater diversity of candidates and better represent the views of the electorate. These objectives will be best served through a combination of campaign contribution limits and a small donor matching program such as Portland's Open and Accountable Elections Program, initiated successfully in the recent election.

In limiting campaign contributions, my view is that a bill need not be perfect to be useful; do not let the best be the enemy of the good. I have read Sen. Golden's bill, but am not competent to judge whether specific provisions such as the amounts of funding permissible in particular circumstances is exactly right, or whether there might be loopholes that need to be plugged. But a bill that is both competent and responsible, as this one clearly is, will do a great deal to improve the integrity of Oregon's elections. And in my opinion, it is important to get this bill, or something comparable, passed during the current legislative session rather than leaving it to a referendum. This is an intrinsically "wonky" topic, and it is unreasonable to expect the general electorate to understand all the complicated issues and tradeoffs involved; therefore, any bill

submitted for referendum will be subject to unprincipled attack from all directions. We elect our representatives to decide matters like this; please do not pass the buck.

Ideally, the legislature should pass both a campaign finance bill and a small-donor matching grant bill; together, these would make a very large and positive contribution to Oregon's democracy. But I understand that the legislature has much to do in this difficult year. If a small donor matching grant program, important as it is, must wait to a future time, so be it. But please make sure that SB336, or some comparable bill, is passed during this legislative session.

Thank you for this chance to express my view.