

I'm an Oregonian and pre-law college student and I support bill 2357 to eliminate OFRI. Following the Oregonian and OPB article about OFRI's lobbying efforts, I've spent time researching OFRI and the structure of their board.

OFRI has a thirteen-member board which includes one public representative who is a non-voting member. The only qualification for the public representative is that they "may not be affiliated with or be a member of any organizations or businesses known to support or promote environmental or conservation issues." This requirement means that the public representative or a potential appointee could not be members of an organization like Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance or the Sierra Club.

You don't need to be an expert in constitutional law to wonder how this qualification is consistent with the First Amendment right to expressive association. The government can't inhibit citizens' constitutional right to freely associate, yet OFRI, a quasi-governmental agency, inhibits their public representative from associating with environmental groups.

Frankly, it alarms me that OFRI doesn't want any environmental viewpoint to be present in their deliberations. This limitation prevents the public representative from representing the diverse interests of Oregonians, many of whom care about and are positively (or negatively) impacted by forestry management.

It would benefit Oregonians to eliminate OFRI, an agency that is in tension with the constitution. Instead of using a biased agency as a middleman, why can't we directly fund forestry education?