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On Behalf Of:
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Measure: HB4024

Reform of Oregon's anything-goes system of campaign financing cannot rely on the Oregon Legislature. Everyone currently in elected office in Salem got there under the same system, one fueled by unlimited campaign contributions. Oregonians overwhelmingly support capping political donations, with 78% voting in favor of the constitutional amendment allowing caps. Nevertheless, the Legislature has repeatedly refused to enact caps, leaving Oregon among only five states that lack them. The reasons for this are simple - campaign contribution caps would require candidates to spend more time on fundraising, disempower the organizations that use the existing system to buy influence, and incentivize independent expenditures that cost those organizations more money.

Small Donor/Voter Financing Takes More Effort. Fundraising is hard work. Running in an Oregon House swing seat in 2018, I spent about half my time raising money. I still only managed to bring in about a third of my fundraising total from my own efforts with small donors, a relatively high proportion of small donors in a swing seat. Despite the challenges of running a small donor campaign, I found it rewarding. Having to ask constituents for their hard-earned money made me attentive to their concerns. I learned a great deal from those conversations. Unfortunately, few politicians want to put in the work to connect personally with hundreds or thousands of small donor constituents, when it's much easier to rely on a few large donors.

Large Donors. In politics, money buys access and results. Look at campaign finance reports in contested races, and you will see three types of large donors - advocacy groups, unions/corporate groups, and caucuses or fellow caucus members. Advocacy groups generally support candidates who support their causes and focus on the races where they can make a difference. For instance, I received significant general election contributions from environmental groups who knew I was stronger on their issues than any Republican opponent, while one of my primary opponents received funding from trial lawyers, who knew I was more moderate on theirs. Members of a group supporting a candidate who shares their values should be free to support that candidate, but when the amounts of money they donate to a candidate they don't know through an advocacy organization dwarf the amounts that candidates can possibly get from their own small donor voters, that forces candidates to prioritize the advocacy group's positions over those of their own voters.

Unions and Corporations/Corporate Groups. While some may object to lumping unions in with corporations, they play the same role, just (usually) on different sides of the issues. Both move large amounts of money and can effectively buy primaries

outright and significantly influence general elections. I recall one instance of a single corporate executive buying a Republican House primary for \$50,000, while a union spent about \$800,000 in last minute spending buying the Secretary of State Democratic primary a few years ago. With their ability to move large amounts of money on short notice, they dominate late spending on the most expensive parts of campaigning - television and radio ads. In return, they get access and influence. While I never saw an instance where I believed a group had bought a vote, I also never saw a legislator refuse a meeting with a large donor.

Caucus Dues and Party Discipline. Members of the same party become part of the party caucus when they are elected. Caucuses also move large sums of money. At least on the Democratic side, these sums come from "dues" paid to the caucus by its members. This creates a fund that acts as an insurance policy. If a candidate's race becomes unexpectedly close, the caucus will swoop in to save the day. If not, the dues paid by a candidate go to a more closely-fought campaign. (Party leadership assignments were also heavily influenced by fundraising prowess.)

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