

February 24, 2025

TO: House Rules Committee

FR: Debra Royal

RE: Written Testimony In Support of HCR 9

Chairman Bowman, Vice-Chair Drazan, members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Concurrent Resolution 9.

For the record, my name is Debra Royal. I was former Oregon Secretary of State Dennis Richardson's Campaign Manager and his Chief of Staff and Communications Director during his tenure as Secretary of State.

Due to my professional relationship with Secretary Richardson, my decades of working on Capitol Hill, at the White House, in Oregon's Executive and Legislative branches, and in political campaign management, I believe I am uniquely qualified to ask for your support in bestowing this honor in memory of Secretary Richardson.

Many of Secretary Richardson's friends and colleagues will provide testimony to this committee as to his strength of character, professionalism, intelligence, integrity, and unmatched love for Oregon, but I would like to focus on one thing - his concern for and work on behalf of children.

Secretary Richardson and his wife, Cathy, became foster parents and later adopted their foster daughter. They had eight other children but still had room in their home and hearts for more. After Secretary and Mrs. Richardson's experience in becoming foster and then adoptive parents, he vowed that if he were ever in a position to make a difference, he would do everything in his power to fix the foster care system. Therefore, in 2017, the first audit he authorized as Secretary of State was on behalf of the children in Oregon's foster care system. The audit's findings were extremely disturbing, and nothing was held back in the official Audit Report. He placed a bright light on what had been hidden for decades. This audit became the impetus for many reforms and accountability mechanisms being instituted at Child Services within the Oregon Department of Human Services. After the audit was completed and released to the public, Secretary Richardson did not just *move on* as so many others would have done. He remained engaged with the Department to ensure that the children were receiving the services and protections they deserved.

Secretary Richardson did not stop there. He authorized an in depth audit of the Portland Public School System that brought to light the urgent need for transparency and accountability in how the state was failing the children who did not live in an optimal zip code. He even started a Town Hall program where Secretary of State auditors went into the communities presenting audit findings to the taxpayers, answering their questions, and bringing back their ideas to Salem. One of the Secretary's first Town Hall meetings was held at Portland Community College to present to parents and the public the problems the PPS audit had uncovered.

Secretary Richardson established many "*firsts*" in the Office of Secretary of State. One of his special projects was the creation of Oregon's Kid Governor. This fun and exciting extracurricular civics program provided every Oregon 5th grader the opportunity to throw their hat into the ring and run for a one-year term as Oregon's Kid Governor.

Secretary Richardson was not only the most optimistic, openminded, curious, and fair politician I have ever worked with, he was also an amazing strategist and tactician. He was constantly thinking outside the box and wanting to know, "how we can" not "why we can't". Without hesitation or fear, Dennis Richardson always walked the walk no matter how rough the road or how long the trip.

Chairman Bowman, Vice-Chair Drazan, members of the committee, again, thank you for the opportunity to provide my testimony. Please vote "Yes" on HCR 9.