

March 7, 2025

Written Testimony from Debra Royal in support of HCR 9 - In memoriam: Secretary of State and former state Representative Dennis Michael Richardson, 1949-2019.

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Bonham, members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Concurrent Resolution 9.

For the record, my name is Debra Royal, Campaign Manager and Chief of Staff and Communications Director to former Secretary of State Dennis Richardson.

Due to my professional relationship with Secretary Richardson, my decades of work 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.

You will hear testimony from Secretary Richardson's friends and colleagues 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 were already the parents of eight 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 Oregon's foster care system. Therefore, in 2017, the first state agency audit that he authorized as Secretary of State was on behalf of children in the foster care system. The audit's findings were extremely disturbing, and nothing was held back in the official Audit Report. He shined a bright light on what had been hidden for decades. This audit became the impetus for many reforms and accountability mechanisms being instituted in the Office of Child Services within the Oregon Department of Human Services. After the audit was 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's work on behalf of children 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 Oregon children who live in a less than optimal zip code. He even started a Town Hall program where Secretary of State auditors went into local communities presenting audit findings to the taxpayers, answering their questions, and bringing back to Salem their personal stories, experiences, and ideas. One of the Secretary's first Town Hall meetings was held at Portland Community College to present to parents, school officials, 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, open-minded, curious, and fair politician I have ever worked with; he was an amazing strategist and tactician. He was constantly thinking outside the box and challenging his staff to bring him proposals on "*how we can*" solve problems not reasons "*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.

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