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On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Rules  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SJR28

Primary talking points:  
SJR 28-1 Right To a Healthy Environment

Oregonians' lives and futures depend on a safe and healthy environment. This amendment puts this key value, that all Oregonians hold, into our State constitution. If passed by the voters, the State government will be required to do a better job to prevent environmental threats to the health and safety of Oregonians.

RTHE makes our state and local governments' responsibility to protect Oregonians from human-caused environmental harm EXPLICIT in our Constitution. Protecting our communities should be our highest government's highest priority. RTHE clears the way for our leaders to do what must be done to protect our lives and futures.

When the U.S. and Oregon constitutions were written, pollution meant nuisance issues like the smell of hog farms or water pollution from tanneries. Today, the health and safety of Oregonians are threatened by toxic pollutants in the air, water and soil and by climate change. This is about updating our constitution, and our rights, to protect us against the greatest threats we face today.

Oregon's current system waits to address environmental threats until public pressure forces the Legislature to act. With huge threats looming, this is like driving at night without headlights. Preventing environmental disasters is much less costly than cleaning up after disasters.

Passing the RTHE amendment will give agencies and their lawyers the power to proactively address threats to our health and safety. The current system limits them to waiting for a public outcry before addressing urgent environmental threats – a recipe for continuous disasters.

In addition to the limited effectiveness of Oregon's current regulatory system, it also depends heavily on federal environmental laws including the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the Environmental Protection Agency's definitions of toxic levels to regulate our air, water, ecosystems, and climate systems. These bedrock environmental laws could be in severe jeopardy with the new administration's general approach against effective environmental protection.