

Subject: Strong Opposition to SB 1599 - Keep the Gas Tax Referendum on the November 2026 Ballot

Dear Members of the Joint Special Committee on Referendum Petition 2026-302,

My name is Tracy, and I am a resident of Sutherlin, Oregon, in Douglas County. I am writing to strongly oppose Senate Bill 1599, which would move the veto referendum on the revenue-raising sections of HB 3991 (including the 6-cent gas tax increase) from the November 2026 general election to the May 2026 primary election.

When more than 250,000 Oregonians—including many here in southern Oregon—signed the referendum petition, we did so expecting it to appear on the November general election ballot, as is standard under Oregon LAW once qualified. Changing the date now, after certification by the Secretary of State, feels like moving the goalposts and UNDERMINES the democratic process we trusted in.

A shift to the May primary would drastically reduce voter turnout. Primaries typically see much lower participation than general elections (and you ALL know that), especially among independents, non-affiliated voters, and folks in rural areas like Sutherlin and Douglas County. Many of us here rely on affordable fuel for commuting, work in logging/timber-related jobs, or drive long distances on rural roads—higher gas taxes hit us hard, and we deserve our full say in a high-turnout election where more voices can be heard.

This change seems driven more by POLITICAL and budgetary convenience for the legislature and ODOT than by FAIRNESS to the people who petitioned for this vote. If the tax hikes are worthwhile, let them face the broadest possible scrutiny in November. Rushing it to May erodes public TRUST and could SUPPRESS opposition in a lower-turnout environment.

I urge the committee to reject SB 1599 and HONOR the original November 2026 ballot placement for Referendum Petition 2026-302. The overwhelming opposition in yesterday's hearing and the thousands of testimonies against this bill show that Oregonians want to keep things as they are.

To honor something (in a political, democratic, or public service sense) means to **respect, uphold, and faithfully adhere to** established rules, processes, promises, or the expressed will of the people—acting with integrity and moral consistency rather than overriding or circumventing them for convenience, political advantage, or expediency.

Specifically for a legislator or public official:

- **Honor** involves integrity (a steady adherence to principles like fairness, transparency, and accountability) and a commitment to the democratic system over personal or partisan goals.
- In this case, it means respecting the standard referendum timeline set by Oregon law and the petition process: Once a veto referendum qualifies (with signatures verified and certified), the measure goes to the **next general election** (November in even years) unless there's a clear, lawful exception. Changing the date after qualification—especially when it could affect turnout and outcome—would fail to "honor" that process by altering the expected playing field post-certification.
- Broader democratic sense: Legislators "honor the will of the people" by not undermining mechanisms (like initiatives/referendums) designed to give citizens direct input, particularly when the people have already mobilized to invoke them. It ties into ideas of public trust—officials should act as stewards of the system, not manipulators of it.

This draws from common understandings of honor in public life: It's not just about personal reputation or titles (like "The Honorable" prefix for officials), but about **moral excellence**—doing what's right by the rules and the citizens, even when it's inconvenient. For example:

- Upholding the spirit and letter of the law on direct democracy tools (Oregon's initiative/referendum system, enshrined since the early 1900s).
- Avoiding actions that appear to suppress broader voter participation or shift timing for strategic reasons.

In short, a legislator who "honors" the referendum process would let it play out as designed—on the November ballot with maximum turnout—rather than pushing a change that many see as eroding that integrity. I am urging you to live up to the higher standard expected of those in public office.

Thank you for your time and for considering the voices of everyday Oregonians like me.

Sincerely,
Tracy Mahoney