

Honest Elections Charter Amendment for Multnomah County

The State Integrity Investigation of the Center for Public Integrity in November 2015 graded Oregon an overall "F" in systems to avoid government corruption. Oregon was ranked 49th worst out of 50 states in control of "Political Financing," beating only Mississippi on that score.

Oregon candidate races are among the most expensive per capita in America. THE OREGONIAN reported that Oregon candidates raise and spend more in their campaigns for the Legislature, per capita, than in any state other than New Jersey (where candidates buy into the expensive New York City media market). The amount spent on races for the Oregon Legislature has increased 10-fold over the past 20 years. Most of those races are not competitive, as one party holds an overwhelming registration advantage in the district. But the average spent in 2014 by each of top 10 Oregon Senate candidates rose to \$750,000; by each of the top 10 Oregon House candidates rose to \$684,000. Some candidates spent over \$70 per vote received.

The same big money arms race has infected local races. Just this year Ted Wheeler spent over \$1 million running for mayor of Portland. In 2012 Charlie Hales spent over \$1.7 million. Races for Multnomah County Commission are also costly. Deborah Kafoury's campaign spent \$466,000 in 2014 v. \$330,000 for her main opponent. This year candidates for district Commissioner seats have spend up to \$153,000 to influence 1/4 of Multnomah County voters.

The largest contributors in local races are typically property developers, construction companies, unions, and health care corporations--all of whom have high financial stakes in local government decisions. It is natural for voters to believe that local governments are acting on behalf of these big funders.

We propose that Multnomah County join Seattle by adopting limits on political campaign contributions, which are in place for 90% of local governments in the United States. The limits we propose are the same as those adopted by voters in Seattle in 2015: candidates may not receive contributions larger than \$500 per person.

Our proposal has other important features. Its major provisions are:

- limits on political campaign contributions and independent expenditures for or against candidates for Multnomah County elected office
- requirement that political ads prominently disclose their actual major funders (not just nice-sounding names of committees or nonprofit corporations)

Limits on campaign contributions and expenditures per Election Cycle

- Prohibits contributions by corporations and other entities to candidates
- Limits candidate to receiving contributions:
 - from any individual: \$500
 - from any political committee: \$500
- Allows formation of Small Donor Committees (SDCs)
 - SDC may accept only contributions in amounts of \$100 or less per person per year
 - SDC may contribute any amounts to candidate races and spend any amount on independent expenditures
- Limits individual independent expenditures in any race to \$5,000 per year
- Limits political committee independent expenditures per race to \$10,000 per year; must be funded by contributions from individuals of \$500 or less

Strong disclosure requirements

- Requires that 5 largest contributors (of \$500 or greater) be listed on political advertisements
- Requires that 5 largest funders (of \$500 or greater) be listed on “independent expenditure” political advertisements

Implementation and Enforcement

- To be implemented by ordinance adopted by Multnomah County Commission by September 2017
- Enforced by Multnomah County Auditor

