

MONEY TALKS, POLITICS WALKS

With most expensive gubernatorial election ever, Oregon looks to deal with money in its campaigns

Oregon's gubernatorial race made national headlines for its massive campaign contributions, which included donations from Nike co-founder and chairman emeritus Phil Knight and Michael Bloomberg of New York.

Special interests plowed money into races for governor, state legislator, county commissioner and other down-ticket offices. In Oregon, there are no limits on campaign contributions, but elected officials want to see a solution.

Oregon's Constitution has a strong First Amendment, which has protected all forms of political speech. That's why you can't just place a cap or limit on campaign contributions, says state Rep. Dan Rayfield of Corvallis.

He and his office, with input from community groups throughout the state, are working on legislation to lessen the impact of money in politics, currently titled House Bill 4076.

Rayfield hopes to introduce the legislation as soon as possible in next year's session, which begins Jan. 22. It would establish a small donor election program that would allow state representative and senatorial candidates to receive a six-to-one match on small donations if they opt in to the state-funded program.

"I look at it as if it's an investment in the long term in our democracy," he says.

He adds that he'd rather have candidates spend time talking with smaller donors than those who have spent thousands of dollars. Having candidates treat small donors like they do a larger donor is well worth the state's investment, Rayfield says.

"When you get people elected by small dollars, that's the type of legislator I want in office. That's the type of legislator that can make a policy decision grounded in community," he says. "I think it's transformative."

The legislation wouldn't affect political action committees (PACs), but Rayfield says he's also working on legislation that would force organizations to disclose large donors.

He says he felt some urgency to act because of the amount of negative advertisements that Priority Oregon put out that targeted Gov. Kate Brown this year. He adds the IRS used to require organizations labeled as 501(c)(4) and 501(c)(6), which are allowed to lobby, to disclose donors who give more than \$5,000. However, the Trump administration ended this requirement.

Rayfield says he plans to file legislation right away when the 2019 legislative session starts that would show who these large donors are.

Independent Party Oregon gubernatorial candidate Patrick Starnes dropped out of the race one week before Election Day to endorse Brown. He told *Eugene Weekly* it was because Brown would be more likely to support campaign finance reform than her challenger, Knute Buehler.

Brown says she wants Oregon to have something similar to the federal limits on contributions, and that "it's appalling" how much money has been spent in the 2018 Oregon election.

Large sums of money weren't just directed at the gubernatorial race, though.

The race to succeed outgoing state Rep. Phil Barnhart brought in more than \$775,000 to state Representative-elect Marty Wilde and Mark Herbert's races.

Oregon Leadership since 2014. McLane's own contributions have so far come from other PACs, including Low Income Dental PAC, which also donated to Buehler's campaign and received large contributions from Advantage Dental, a dental services company. McLane has also received smaller contributions from out-of-state companies like Amazon.com, Coca-Cola, Alaska Airlines and Monsanto. This money then made its way to Herbert's campaign.

Raising money, as in the case of McLane, has become one of the major roles in political leadership, Titus says. To rise up in the political ranks, one must be active in fundraising, not just for one's own campaign, but also for other candidates, she says.

Rayfield says fundraising for other candidates is one of the responsibilities of political leadership that isn't limited to the Republican Party.

Just as Rayfield is looking at a legislative solution, Brown is now openly talking about drafting a constitutional amendment. But if neither the Legislature nor the governor put forth a solution to campaign finances, it could result in a voter-driven policy. The limits would be harsher if it's the public pushing it, Titus says.

Titus says finance reform should be done by legislators and closely monitored to make adjustments, not placed on a ballot through initiative petition by voters — it should be done under a scalpel, not a chainsaw, she says.

Campaign finance reform is a big issue for both Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, and both want to push for reform at the federal level. Campaign finance reform at the state level isn't enough. It needs to be a top priority for every level of government, Wyden says. He adds that he wants to "blow up the dark money juggernaut."

Merkley also tells *EW* that reform needs to happen at the federal level. He says if campaign finance reform focuses on candidate caps, money would just flow through PACs, which are less accountable, more ruthless and less accurate in its political advertisements.

Merkley references Thomas Jefferson in stating the importance of having each citizen's voice heard equally. The Supreme Court's ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC* has damaged that ideal.

"*Citizens United* and billionaire money disrupts and replaces government of by and for the people with government of by and for the powerful," he says. ■

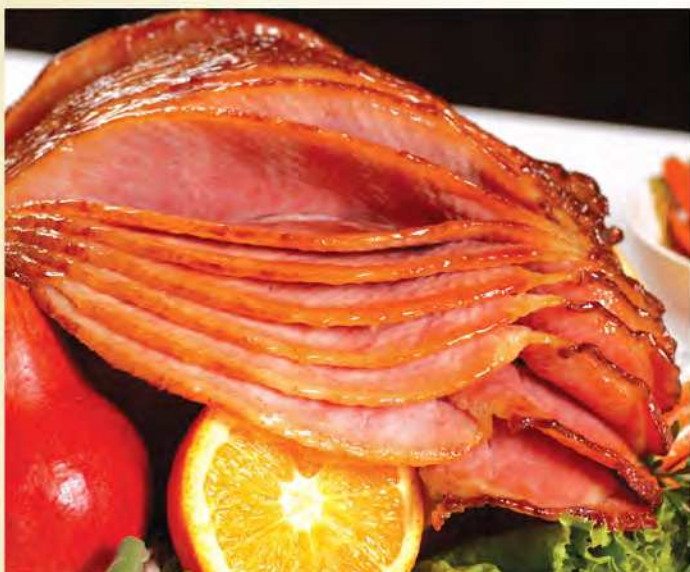
CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM AT THE STATE LEVEL ISN'T ENOUGH. IT NEEDS TO BE A TOP PRIORITY FOR EVERY LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT, SEN. RON WYDEN SAYS. HE ADDS THAT HE WANTS TO 'BLOW UP THE DARK MONEY JUGGERNAUT.'

The complicated way finances make their way to campaigns can sound like political money laundering, and that's a great way of looking at it, says Kate Titus, executive director of Common Cause Oregon, a nonpartisan public interest group that looks to devalue the role of money in politics as one of its goals. And if it sounds complicated, it is.

Herbert received most of his money from natural resources and leadership PACs, such as \$35,000 from Oregon Forest Industries Council PAC, Community Action Network and Promote Oregon Leadership PAC.

Community Action Network and Oregon Forest Industries PACs are explicit in their contributions from natural resource industries, but Promote Oregon Leadership PAC has received the most financial contributions from a state representative in Bend, state Rep. Mike McLane, the House Republican Leader.

McLane has contributed \$491,000 total to the Promote



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