



The League of Women Voters

OF PORTLAND OREGON

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Voter Owned Elections City Council April 7, 2005

The League of Women Voters promotes the informed and active participation of citizens in government. We encourage our members and all citizens to cast informed votes and to participate in governmental decision-making. As an organization actively involved in the election process, we neither support nor oppose candidates, but publish a Voter's Guide and organize candidate debates.

The League has worked for over 25 years at the national level on campaign finance reform and more recently in a variety of states, including Oregon. We are pleased to support this effort in Portland and enthusiastically encourage you to vote in favor of today's resolution. A Portland system of voter-owned elections will benefit the voters, those wishing to run for public office, and elected officials.

In our view, one of the root causes of the apathy, mistrust and cynicism so prevalent amongst citizens today is our system of campaign finance. As you are well aware, candidates for public office must devote an extraordinary amount of time to fundraising. Some of the largest contributions come from individuals and corporations doing business with the city. Regardless of whether these contributions influence future council votes, the public has the perception that those special interests have the greatest clout at city hall. The public perceives that the individual citizen or neighborhood group is at a disadvantage when they advocate for a particular issue. In time, some decide it is meaningless to get involved or even to vote. Getting special interest money out of the process will open up the political process and help restore the public's trust in their government.

Furthermore, the political process is enriched when a broad array of capable and gifted candidates choose to run for office and inject new ideas and enthusiasm into the campaign. Unfortunately, under the current system, the ability to raise large sums of money is an essential qualification for potential candidates. If we adopt voter-owned elections, candidates will be free to dispense with large-scale fundraising and concentrate instead on spending time discussing issues and ideas with the voters. Voters will know that candidates elected under this program are not beholden to large donors and will begin to realize that their opinions and vote will truly make a difference. In addition, the time spent in meaningful dialogue with the public during the campaign will enhance and deepen the candidates' understanding of the complex issues facing our city and help those elected to office be more effective leaders.

You have the opportunity to make a groundbreaking decision today and adopt a system of campaign finance here in Portland that will help restore trust in government, attract talented candidates, and give our elected officials the opportunity to lead without the influence of special interest money. The League thanks Auditor Blackmer and Commissioner Sten for their leadership on this and urges a yes vote on the resolution before you.

"To promote political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government."