

## Editorial: Special interests hijack state's initiative system

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By NewsRegister.com

Oregon's initiative system has been hijacked by for-profit extremists financed in great measure by out-of-state money. William U'Ren must be rolling over in his grave.

U'Ren, elected to the Oregon Legislature in 1896 from the People's Party, formed a coalition in 1898 to gain approval of a constitutional amendment giving birth to the initiative and referendum process. In 1902, Oregon became the third state, behind South Dakota and Utah, to adopt the process.

According to Oregon's Blue Book, a flood of progressive legislation followed in the next 10 years, including the direct primary, the direct election of United States senators and women's suffrage.

But in the last couple of decades, instead of representing broad-based populist movements, a great many of Oregon's initiative petitions come from the same group of activists: Don McIntire, Larry George, Dave Hunnicutt, Kevin Mannix, Russell Walker and the granddaddy of them all, Bill Sizemore. These last three men make their living in one way or another from campaign donations pushing their ultra-conservative agenda.

And one man, former Oregon resident Loren Parks, has been signing donation checks for many of these campaigns. As of the end of last month, he had donated 52 percent of the funding — \$840,000 — to six of the eight measures that qualified for this November's ballot. He donated another \$560,000 to initiatives that didn't qualify, making his total donations \$1.35 million for the 2008 election. So far.

To put Parks' donations in perspective, he gave 68 percent or more of the total collected for each of the six ballot measures, and 87 percent of one of them.

Sizemore's one "Park-less" initiative is Measure 63, which exempts construction and renovation projects costing \$35,000 or less from needing building permits. Ninety-nine percent of its donations came from one company affiliated with Richard Wendt of Jeld-Wen, Inc., an international door and window manufacturer.

The final initiative ballot measure is the Phil Keisling / Norma Paulus open primary system, under which candidates would face all voters in primary elections, with the top two vote-getters going on to the general election. This initiative campaign collected more in contributions than the others, and its donor base was much broader. Its largest single contribution was 14 percent of the total.

Of the four legislatively referred ballot measures, two are simple housekeeping measures.

Interestingly, the third would repeal Sizemore's problematic double-majority rule, which requires money measures to receive not only the majority of votes, but do so in an election in which the majority of the registered voters actually cast ballots.

The fourth referendum calls for increased sentences for certain drug and theft crimes. It is the Legislature's alternative to Kevin Mannix's much tougher measure on the same ballot. Mannix's onerous measure would mean more tax money steered toward construction of prisons and less funding for other important programs.

In weeks to come on this page, we'll tell you what we think of all 12 ballot measures. One thing we already can say, however, is this election is another example of how Oregon's initiative process has been prostituted.

William U'Ren worked for many long years to give the people a voice in their government. If he were

alive today, we think he'd feel as we do — it's time to take that process back from the Sizemores and Mannixes and their sugar daddy, Mr. Parks.