

**Washington Public Campaigns**  
**Testimony re: HB 2499 and HB 2500 - Public Hearing - January 30, 2012**  
**House Committee on State Government and Tribal Relations**

Chairman Representative Hunt and Members of the Committee:

For the record and testifying on behalf of Washington Public Campaigns: I am Craig Salins.  
Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments regarding [HB 2499](#) and [HB 2500](#).

Our state's constitution was drafted in 1878, enshrining the citizens' right to sovereign self-government - partly by means of a Citizen Initiative process so that ordinary citizens could speak to the legislature and propose public policies and reforms for direct voter consideration.

Today, 130 years later, where is the "citizen" in the citizen initiative process?

The entire ballot measure process has gone for sale - to deep financial pockets and special interests, who pay millions for signature-gathering and campaign ads. It has been hijacked to benefit the health of corporate profit rather than the health of our state's public services and local economy.

We must get it back - or we may as well forget calling our system a voter-driven democratic republic.

For those reasons, we heartily support efforts to reform the state's citizen initiative process in ways to ensure integrity and to protect it from abuse by private special interests.

**We urge this Committee to move these bills to the next step, before these week's deadline!**

In particular: We support limits on contributions to political committees created to support or oppose ballot measures and referenda, as provided in HB 2500. And we support robust disclosure of such contributions and spending by initiative PACs and backers, as provided in HB 2499. These are necessary steps, to slow the trends where ballot measure elections have essentially become auctions, won by any special interest with the deepest pocket, willing to spend as the highest bid.

Voters should not have to hire Sherlock Holmes to determine who is buying propaganda to influence their vote. And voters should not be out-shouted or inundated by millions of dollars in spending for TV ads and postal mailers, often with information that is misleading or untrue.

The egregious spending on campaigns and elections today has become an alarming threat to our democratic process - a hideous twist where "one-person, one-vote" has become "one-dollar, one-vote."

This legislature must act - this session - to reclaim democracy for We The People.

**This is the predominant public policy concern we face today.** It is aggravated by the 2010 Supreme Court decision in the *Citizens United* case, allowing unlimited corporate spending to influence elections. The ruling applies the right of free speech to global corporations, treating them as flesh-and-blood citizens even as they are granted perpetual life and limited liability in law.

In 2010, \$57 million was spent for signatures and voter persuasion on nine ballot measures and one referendum. This was four times greater per ballot measure than ever before in Washington state - and nearly all of it was corporate cash, a significant proportion contributed by out-of-state entities whose primary concern is their stock price and corporate bottom line.

The election season of 2010 also saw unprecedented contributions to the initiative process by oil giants Tesoro and BP - again, not unrelated to their corporate special interest. They bankrolled a measure making it difficult to close existing business tax loopholes or to adopt measures that might be good for public health and welfare but bad for industry profit.

Yet these amounts were trumped in 2011, by a \$22 million contribution by a single business entity to mount and then campaign for a ballot measure. These are the trends. How can our citizen voters possibly keep their bearings in the tsunami and political wind of such spending?

**We urge this committee to approve HB 2499 and HB 2500 - today, before committee cutoff!** - to protect the integrity of our state's citizen initiative process.

Thank you.

~ Craig Salins  
Washington Public Campaigns  
[www.washclean.org](http://www.washclean.org)  
[craig@washclean.org](mailto:craig@washclean.org)  
206-784-2522.