

March 28, 2007—Testimony before the Oregon State Legislature

Committee on Elections, Ethics and Rules

Re: HB 3040 (Fusion Voting)

By Miles Rapoport

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Good morning, Madame Chairwoman and members of the Committee. My name is Miles Rapoport. I am the President of Demos – a non-partisan public policy research and advocacy organization based in New York City that studies and advocates for election reforms that increase civic participation and strengthen the fabric of our nation’s democracy.

I also have extensive experience in Connecticut on election issues. I served on the Government Administration and Elections Committee for 10 years, from 1985–94, and served as chair during 1993-94. I am also a former Secretary of the State of Connecticut, serving in that role from 1995-1998. As Secretary of the State, much of my work involved election administration.

Because Connecticut is one of the few states in which fusion is still legal, I have first-hand experience with this system. Indeed, I not only administered elections in which fusion voting was used, I actually ran as a candidate in two elections where I was a “fusion” candidate. I also discussed and defended fusion voting as chair of the GAE Committee in 1993-1994.

Connecticut’s experience is that fusion is a simple and effective reform, both for voters and from an administrative perspective. Some candidates ran on only a single party line and others were cross-endorsed and had two nominations – in either case voters understood what was going on and administrators (from registrars of voters on up to the state level) had no problem counting votes. But one notes that the cross-endorsed candidates knew they were benefiting from coalitional politics in their elections – and therefore that citizens casting their votes for them on independent party lines wanted them to prioritize certain key issues.

In our report, “Fusion Voting: An Analysis”, Demos has conducted a thorough analysis of fusion voting in the states where it currently exists and in states where legislation designed to revive it is currently pending. I will allow Ben Healey of our partner institution – the Public Policy Institute of Massachusetts – to present the bulk of this research, but let me lay out the bottom line before turning things over to him:

- Fusion voting is a useful reform to our electoral system. I believe that in general we should open our system to the widest participation and the most choices by

voters, and also to the most access possible to the ballot for candidates and parties. Fusion voting allows this, and solves the “wasted vote” and “spoiler” dilemmas that otherwise plague minor parties. It gives voters more meaningful choices, it increases the *constructive* role of independent third parties, and it can focus the political agenda on issues important to the electorate that often end up getting caught in partisan gridlock.

- Fusion voting is simple. It has been utilized to a significant degree in Connecticut over the last several years, and there has been remarkably little voter confusion about it.
- Fusion voting is inexpensive. Indeed, one could argue that there are virtually no fiscal implications.

As you all know, the question of electoral reform is by now a constant in American political life. From my perspective, that’s a healthy development, as it demonstrates that elected officials, election administrators and the voting public now appreciate, as never before, how the very rules of democracy are important.

There are many reforms currently being discussed to improve our electoral system. We know, because Demos has studied all of them! Let me confidently assert that fusion voting is simple and inexpensive to implement, and this year, legislators in several other states – Maine and New Mexico among them – are examining the possibility of restoring fusion voting. I urge Oregon legislators to lead the way by passing HB 3040. And, with that, I’ll turn things over to Ben and stay on the line for any questions you may have.