

# The Oregonian

## What's a game to them is dead serious to Oregon

**Out-of-state groups are free to exploit our open initiative process, but Oregonians should never allow their state to be used**

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This fall, Oregon will be a political laboratory.

And you'll be a lab rat.

Two national groups have already spent more than a million dollars to salt Oregon's November ballot with a new state spending limit and term limits for legislators. For the next few months, they'll be eagerly watching from their Illinois and New York headquarters, now and then tossing more money into Oregon, hoping you bite on Election Day.

For them, this is just another political experiment. For Oregon, though, it is yet another crossroads in a maze of dead ends.

The sponsors of the initiatives insist that the source of the money behind their proposals is irrelevant. All that matters, they say, is whether Oregonians sign the petitions to get the proposals on the ballot, and whether they vote for them in November.

It is true that the ultimate decision lies with Oregonians. But it is also true that neither of these issues would be before voters this year, or would have had any realistic chance of making the ballot, but for all the money and motivation of the out-of-state groups.

The spending limit -- a knockoff of the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (Tabor) law that strangled Colorado's schools and universities -- is brought to you by Americans for Limited Government, a conservative group based in a Chicago suburb. The group, led by Howard Rich, who lives in New York City, has spent nearly \$600,000 so far on the Oregon initiative.

Meanwhile, U.S. Term Limits, which Rich also founded, and which is reportedly moving from the Chicago suburbs to New York, has spent \$500,000 on its Oregon initiative, funding virtually the entire campaign to reimpose term limits in this state.

Nothing, of course stops anyone from using Oregon's beloved initiative and referendum, ever since 1904, when this state became the first to put citizen initiatives on its ballot. Nothing prevents Rich or anyone else from spending millions of dollars more in the next few months to try to persuade Oregon voters to approve their initiatives. This is a wide open system, and Oregonians seem to like it that way.

But nothing also prevents voters from strongly resisting every attempt to use Oregon and other open-initiative states as political playgrounds, handy places to shop ideas such as Tabor and term limits.

Oregon does not need a new state spending limit, certainly not one that would choke another billion-plus dollars out of its beleaguered public school and university systems. It also does not need to repeat its brief and destructive experience with term limits, which shoved able leaders out of Salem and left the Legislature more confused and adrift than ever.

Yet if both of these proposals make the ballot, as seems likely, they will dominate political discussion in this state and sop up millions of dollars in campaign spending. They are both superficially appealing ideas -- it's not hard to whip up votes against government spending and career politicians -- and many Oregonians will be attracted to them.

But remember this: The day after the November election, Americans for Limited Government and U.S. Term Limits will be moving on. They'll just scurry off to their next experiment.

Unlike Oregonians, they won't have to live with the consequences.