

January 16, 2008

The Oregonian
1320 S.W. Broadway
Portland, OR 97201

In an editorial on January 10, The Oregonian lauded proposals by the Portland City Club to “reform” Oregon’s initiative process by changing it from a direct initiative to an indirect initiative, among other things.

What the initiative process needs is for political elites to recognize that it belongs to all the people and is not an exclusive playground for those in power. The only reforms we need in the initiative system are to open it up along the lines of its original design rather than further restrict the process.

This newspaper refers to the initiative system as one of Oregon’s “peculiarities.” Would you say this about the bottle bill? How about our beach access law? I prefer to think of the initiative system as one of Oregon’s populist gifts to be treasured, not trivialized.

After all, this is the system which gave us workers’ compensation for injured workers, direct election of US Senators, primary nominations (rather than caucuses) for candidates, and the right of women to vote. It is neither liberal nor conservative. It is as progressive as the people wish it.

This newspaper characterizes the initiative as being essentially for the protection of the people “against” the legislature. This reflects a misunderstanding of the initiative system.

The initiative process empowers the people to go around the established political order when the people demand reforms which the political elites do not want to deliver. This was the case with Measure 11, in 1994, establishing mandatory minimum prison sentences for violent criminals.

The political elites did not want such prison sentences. By a 66% vote, the people imposed such sentences - and Oregon led the nation (first of 50 states) in the reduction of violent crime, over the next 10 years.

These kinds of changes occur when the people come together and exercise their common sense for the common good.

I believe in the legislative process. In my 10 years as a legislator, I pushed through 135 bills, and I am pleased with the progress they brought us. However, there are times when the legislative

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process fails, especially when special interests block a bill. If the issue is important enough and it has broad support, it can be brought to the people.

Our initiative process belongs to the people, and we should resist efforts to burden it with delays and bureaucracy.

Sincerely,

Kevin L. Mannix

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