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Senator Marv Hagedorn
5285 W. Ridgeside St.
Meridian, ID 8646

Dear Senator Hagedorn,

I am writing to you as a member of the interim committee on campaign finance and ethics reform. During your first committee meeting in July I was traveling and unable to attend and testify. However, I did follow along closely and believe I can offer some perspective and input regarding these efforts that may be useful. Our office handles issues of campaign finance at a local level. Additionally, this is a policy area I have taken a strong personal interest in. Public confidence and transparency in elections, and the money that supports it, is important.

During the first meeting there was a lot of discussion regarding money in politics, including "dark money," and it buying influence, which I believe is a misconception. Alternatively, there was also discussion about how our laws work well. Regardless of which angle one comes from, I believe this doesn't reflect where we are today. Idaho is well represented by good people and when we shine light on how they operate, as the sunshine laws are supposed to do, the public is best served. They also get to see and confirm that the "dark money" isn't there as some perceive. That said, our laws also do not reflect modern tools, campaigns, and practices and are in need of review.

I encourage the committee to step back and assess whether we are as transparent as we can or want to be. I believe we can do more to help build greater public confidence in what we have.

The best place to begin is to simplify our laws and work to make compliance easy. One of the most common complaints I hear is that the law is too complicated and overwhelming. What does your political treasurer think? I believe that if we can make compliance easy, it not only makes everyone's lives easier, it also opens up opportunities to make our system more transparent and to expand the reach of the sunshine we currently have and seek.

Following ease of compliance, we should make the laws more enforceable. The Secretary of State is seeking greater authority and more tools to enforce these laws. This should be granted. We don't want to punish people for innocent filing mistakes. Under the current framework, this concern exists because compliance can be complicated. If we first simplify our laws and make compliance easier, then the chances of inadvertently punishing those who make an innocent mistake is greatly diminished. This opens the door for the Secretary of State to ensure compliance among those who are neglecting to follow the law.

Transparency is our goal. We need to make it much easier for the public to see where the money comes from and where it is spent. Currently it is difficult to find out who is giving to who and to track where all of the money is going. This is true even among all those who file appropriately. When your committee meets next I hope to share with you some examples of what is possible when we leverage the information we collect and make it more accessible to the public.

I'm confident that by investing the time and resources to simplify our laws and practices to fit contemporary campaigns, lobbying and technology we can make huge strides in building even greater public confidence through transparency. I view our sunshine laws as having three phases; 1) before you're in office (i.e. campaigns and PACs), 2) while you're in office (legislators and lobbying), and 3) after you're in office. I encourage the committee to begin with when a campaign starts by filing a political treasurer and walk through each aspect of each phase. It will provide you a framework to manage all that is involved in our sunshine laws and ensure that you've covered all the things you intended to cover.

At your next meeting on the 28th I hope to have the opportunity to reiterate some of these points, answer questions, and share some specific examples of where we could go and what we could achieve if we embrace this opportunity. Thank you for your service and thank you for your participation on this committee addressing such an important topic.

Sincerely,



Phil McGrane, J.D.