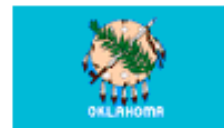




OBAR Oklahomans for Ballot Access Reform

a coalition of Oklahomans working for FAIR laws that give voters genuine choices



CONTACT:

Angelia O'Dell, Chair
Phone: 918.510.8316
E-mail: oklpchair@yahoo.com
www.okvoterchoice.org

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Feb. 1, 2010

Another chance to give voters choice

OKLAHOMA CITY – This year's Oklahoma House and Senate leaders hold the key to opening up the state's election ballots to more competition for candidates and more choices for voters. The question is: Will lawmakers choose to use that key?

An overwhelming majority of lawmakers approved **House Bill 1072** before a conference committee tabled it at the close of the 2009 session. The bill would lower the number of petition signatures needed to recognize a new political party. The committee has the option of revisiting the bill this year.

To get on the ballot, current law requires unqualified parties to gather signatures from a number of registered voters equal to 5 percent of the turnout in the previous gubernatorial or presidential election. For this year's ballot, new parties need 5 percent of the state's 2008 turnout – about 73,000 signatures.

On March 11, 2009, the House passed a version of HB 1072 by a vote of 86 - 5 that would tie the signature requirement to only the gubernatorial election vote. The change would have lowered the signature threshold for new parties by about 27,000 signatures for this year's election, while leaving it unchanged for 2012.

Oklahomans for Ballot Access Reform has been calling on lawmakers to return the requirement to a flat 5,000 signatures, as it was from 1924 to 1974; therefore, OBAR members are questioning whether the House version of HB 1072 offers much by way of reform.

"The House version of HB 1072 wouldn't be much of an improvement for third-party ballot access," Angelia O'Dell, chairwoman of Oklahomans for Ballot Access Reform, said. "Even if the House version becomes law, Oklahoma would continue to have the nation's highest mandatory signature requirement for third parties."

OBAR gained hope when the Senate Rules Committee amended HB 1072 to 3 percent of the gubernatorial vote, which would amount to a difference of about 45,000 signatures for new parties in 2010. On April 1, the full Senate unanimously approved the amended version, 46 - 0.

House and Senate leaders then got a chance to work out a final version of HB 1072 in conference committee, but time ran out and the bill was tabled. OBAR is calling on the

committee to revisit the bill this year and compromise on a version that offers real reform.

“We were very excited about the Senate vote last year, but we weren’t fooled. At 3 percent, Oklahoma would still be out in left field on this issue in comparison to the rest of the country,” OBAR Vice Chair Micah Gamino said. “Oklahoma won’t be more closely aligned with other states until the requirement gets down at least to 2 percent, or lower.”

Ballot Access News publisher Richard Winger recently affirmed OBAR’s concerns regarding a 3 percent threshold, saying, “For president, even at 3 percent, Oklahoma will still be 50 percent worse than the second-hardest state. For full party status, Oklahoma, at 3 percent of the last gubernatorial vote, would be tied with Alabama for worst signature requirement.”

30

OBAR is a coalition of the Libertarian Party of Oklahoma, the Green Party of Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Constitution Party, the Oklahoma Socialist Party and the Oklahoma Coalition of Independents. Supporting or endorsing organizations include The Free & Equal Elections Foundation, FairVote: The Center for Voting and Democracy and The Coalition for Free and Open Elections. OBAR is seeking to make election laws fair for new political parties and independent candidates.

