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House passes ballot access measure

Oklahoma City (March 12, 2009) -- A bill aimed at making it easier to form new political parties in Oklahoma overwhelmingly passed the state House on March 11.

House Bill 1072 passed by a vote of 86 - 5. The bill now goes to the Senate.

If HB 1072 becomes law, new political parties should enjoy a lower signature requirement to get on the ballot.

Oklahoma law required over 70,000 signatures of registered voters in 2006 to get a candidate for an unrecognized political party on the ballot, and nearly 50,000 in 2008. This was ten times the recent per capita requirement in Texas, Missouri and New Mexico.

The number of signatures required currently is equal to five percent of the votes cast in the previous gubernatorial or presidential election. HB 1072 bases the number of signatures solely on the previous gubernatorial election. This would lower the requirement to about 46,000 signatures in 2010.

"This bill is about reforming the most exclusionary election laws in the country," said Angelia O'Dell, Vice Chair of Oklahomans for Ballot Access Reform. "Many Oklahoma voters are tired of feeling marginalized by the two major parties. They want choices when they go to the polls. HB 1072 is an important step towards giving voters those choices."

Oklahoma stood alone in offering voters only two choices in the last two presidential elections. All other states in the region - Arkansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico - listed multiple candidates for president on their ballots in the last election.

Only Texas came close to Oklahoma's lack of choices in November -- with three candidates on the ballot, but with several others allowed a write-in.

In 2007, OBAR collected over 14,000 signatures for an initiative that would return the number of signatures for recognition of political party back to 5,000, the number required in Oklahoma from 1924 until 1974.

OBAR is a coalition of the Libertarian, Green, and Constitution parties and the Oklahoma Coalition of Independents, unified with the simple goal of making laws fair for new political parties.