



OBAR Oklahomans for Ballot Access Reform

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



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Time runs out for ballot access reform bill

Oklahoma City (May 19, 2009) -- A ballot access reform bill that received strong support in the Oklahoma legislature this year was tabled in conference committee Monday after House and Senate leaders failed to agree on new requirements for forming a recognized political party in the state. The move will give the committee a chance to revisit the legislation again next year.

"The strong support for House Bill 1072 showed us that legislators now recognize their constituents' concerns about voter choice." said Joni LeViness, Chair of Oklahomans for Ballot Access Reform (OBAR). "However, the tabling of our bill tells us we have more educating to do."

HB 1072, authored by Rep. Charles Key, R-Oklahoma City, passed both houses with flying colors this year, albeit in different forms, but was finally tabled in Conference Committee after members couldn't agree on the bill's final version.

Current law requires new parties to demonstrate public support before their candidates can be placed on state election ballots. The law requires signatures equal to five percent of the previous gubernatorial or presidential election turnout, or 73,000 signatures to run candidates in 2010 under the party's name.

OBAR has been asking lawmakers since 2004 to return the signature threshold to 5,000, which was the requirement from 1924 until 1974.

A House version of HB 1072, passed 86-5 on March 11, would have tied the signature requirement to only the gubernatorial election. The change would have lowered the threshold by nearly 30,000 signatures for the 2010 election.

The Senate on April 1 passed a more substantial version of the bill by a vote of 46-0. The version lowered the petition requirement from five to three percent -- a difference of about 50,000 signatures for 2010.

Oklahoma is regarded as having the most restrictive ballot access petition requirements in the country. Oklahoma was the only state in both the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections to have only two candidates - the Democrat and Republican - on the ballot.

Richard Winger, editor of *Ballot Access News*, a national newsletter that examines states' ballot access laws, said "Oklahoma is the only state in the nation in which a party can't place its nominees for all statewide offices on the general election ballot with the party label unless it does a five percent petition. All the other states have procedures at or below two percent, except that Alabama is three percent of the last gubernatorial vote. Oklahoma is all alone in being above three percent."

Meanwhile, a number of other states this year have considered or successfully lowered their ballot access requirements -- including West Virginia, Arkansas, and Utah, Winger said.

OBAR Vice-Chair and Libertarian Party of Oklahoma representative Angelia O'Dell said, "I feel that we have had a great run with House Bill 1072 and I'm looking forward to educating the House on the ballot access problems that all third parties face in Oklahoma and seeing this bill pass next year."

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 Free and Equal, FairVote: The Center for Voting and Democracy, The Coalition for Free and Open Elections, and Instant Runoff Oklahoma. OBAR functions under the unified goal of making laws fair for new political parties.

