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## Media Advisory

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## Senator Ben Westlund to Host Community Conversation Open Primary Initiative Will Address Extreme Partisanship in Politics

BEND, Ore. (January 10, 2006) – Oregon Senator Ben Westlund ([www.benwestlund.com](http://www.benwestlund.com)) will be hosting a community conversation on the Open Primary Initiative ([www.oneballot.org](http://www.oneballot.org)) at Evo’s coffee house, 376 E. Main St. in Ashland, on Saturday, January 14, 2006 from 10:00am to 11:15am.

If the Open Primary Initiative passes, all voters, regardless of political party affiliation – or lack thereof – will receive a ballot with every candidate listed for the May primary election. Each registered voter can vote for whom ever they feel best represents them, regardless of political party. The top two vote getters advance to the November General election.

The current closed primary excludes nonaffiliated and minor party voters from participating. There are seven parties in Oregon and 25% (1/3 of younger voters) are affiliated with a minor party and increasingly unaffiliated. As a consequence a large number of voters are left disenfranchised and the candidates in the General election are being determined by the most partisan voters.

“Paralyzing partisanship is keeping us from solving Oregon’s most critical problems. We elect the most democratic Democrats and the most republican Republicans then we send them all to Salem and wonder why they can’t get along,” said Westlund. “It’s time to put ideas before ideology and people before party. The Open Primary will help us do that.”

Westlund, who has earned a reputation for working across the aisle on issues like healthcare and education, has served as a Republican in the state legislature since 1997. He was elected first as the state representative from rural Central Oregon and later as the Senator from Deschutes County, receiving both the Democrat and Republican nominations in his last election.

A lung cancer survivor, Westlund brought many in the Capitol to tears in June 2003 when he delivered his “return from the hospital” speech on the floor of the Oregon State House where he called on his colleagues to put aside partisanship and start being statesmen who put the next generation above their next election.

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