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Conflicts of interest lead nurses to call for full transparency from Oregon Secretary of State Dennis Richardson

(TUALATIN, Ore.) – Today the Oregon Nurses Association sent a letter to Oregon Secretary of State Dennis Richardson pointing out the complicated political and financial relationship between the state elections overseer and the chief petitioner of Referendum 301, which is on the streets now for signature gathering.

The chief petitioner of Referendum 301, Julie Parrish, is currently working as a paid political consultant for Dennis Richardson, having received nearly $330,000 from his campaign and payments as recently as July 3, 2017. Parrish also serves as an elected official in the state House of Representatives and has also contributed more than $20,000 to Dennis Richardson’s campaign.

The Secretary of State has essential roles relating to the referendum. His office is responsible for setting the rules for the January special election and overseeing the signature gathering and validation process for the referendum.

The financial and political relationship between these two public officials raised concerns after Dennis Richardson issued a news release last month that echoed Rep. Parrish’s talking points on the timing of the January special election. It is unclear whether Rep. Parrish wrote that release in her role as a consultant.

“We are in an unprecedented situation that raises serious questions about the Secretary of State’s ability to run a fair election. Hundreds of thousands of our patients stand to lose health care with the referendum and hundreds of thousands more will see increased premiums. There is too much at stake to let politics ruin the process,” said Bruce Humphreys, RN, president of ONA’s PAC board. “The best thing for Secretary Richardson to do is to be fully transparent and post every communication and document about the referendum and special election on a website for everyone to see. We would also ask him to consider recusing himself from any future decision-making or statements about these matters.”

The letter to the Secretary of State with other examples of conflicts can be found here along with supporting documents.