

General Benefits of Public Financing of Elections

PUBLIC FINANCING OVERVIEW:

Public Financing of Elections is an optional system that seeks to remove the influence of money in politics. It is based on the idea that any qualified person should be able to run for political office and represent their community. Public financing reinforces the direct communication between voters and representatives by allowing candidates to concentrate on issues rather than fundraising.

Under the system, participating candidates collect a certain number of qualifying contributions. Qualified candidates receive state funds for running both primary and general election campaigns, and publicly financed candidates running against privately financed candidates receive additional funds for every dollar that their opponent raises above their initial allotment.

LEGISLATORS CAN SPEND LESS TIME FUNDRAISING:

Under the current system of elections, politicians have to spend a large amount of their time fundraising for their next election, leaving them less time to deal with constituent concerns. Candidates at the state level must dedicate a great deal of their personal campaign schedule to fundraising – 33% of legislators spend over a quarter of their time raising money and 10% spend over half of their time doing it.

Publicly financed elections mean that candidates and politicians can worry less about raising money and more about meeting with their constituents. Without the burden of fundraising, they will be able to go door-to-door and talk to their neighbors and the people they will represent about the real issues that matter most, something they would not have time for if they had to regularly meet with donors.



PUBLIC FINANCING CREATES FAIR ELECTIONS:

Elections that are exclusively privately financed reward the best fundraisers rather than the candidates with the best ideas. In Rhode Island, legislative candidates who raised the most money won their elections 97% of the time, and winners in the general election out-raised losing opponents by ratio of 3 to 1. Fair elections give an equal voice to candidates that are not expert fundraisers, and it levels the playing field to allow everyone to run based on their merits.



On Arizona's landmark Senior Prescription Drug Plan, "If I had not run [using public financing], I would surely have been paid visits by numerous campaign contributors representing pharmaceutical interests and the like, urging me either to shelve that idea or to create it in their image. All the while, they would be wielding the implied threat to yank their support and shop for an opponent in four years. [Instead,] I was able to create this program based on one and only one variable: the best interests of Arizona's senior citizens"

- Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano

FAIR ELECTIONS INCREASE VOTER CONFIDENCE AND TURNOUT

As elections become increasingly dependent on raised funds, voters show record-low levels of confidence in American government. Approval of the United States Congress is 21%, an all-time low since Gallup has begun polling on that measure, and as many people believe that most members of Congress are corrupt as do not. Fully 82% of voters believe it is likely, as a result of publicly financed elections, that candidates will win on their ideas instead of the money they raise, and 81% believe it is likely that politicians will be more accountable to voters instead of large contributors

Low voter participation is one of the main concerns in American democracy today. Fair Elections are a way to boost voter turnout significantly and get more citizens involved in decisions about government. In Arizona, with the institution of public financing of elections, voter participation increased 18% between 1998 and 2006. Rhode Island's participation level was 53% in 2006, among the lowest in the country even with highly contested gubernatorial and senatorial races.

FAIR ELECTIONS REDUCES THE POWER OF SPECIAL INTERESTS:

By eliminating the need for large donors, officeholders will no longer be beholden to the influence of special interests and corporate moneygivers. Instead, legislators will be able to vote with confidence for the bills that most benefit their constituents and the people of Rhode Island. Also, by allowing potential candidates to meet with voters rather than host fundraisers, public financing reinforces the bond that citizens have with their democratic government and helps the government best serve the people.

SUPPORT IN RHODE ISLAND:

A number of environmental, religious, student, and citizens groups already support Fair Elections. These supporters include Common Cause, the League of Women Voters, Operation Clean Government, the National Organization of Women, the Rhode Island Council of Churches, the American Association of University Women, United Service Allied Workers of Rhode Island, the Green Party of Rhode Island, Rhode Island Public Interest Research Group, Clean Water Action, and Environmental Council of Rhode Island. Fair Elections also has the support of a number of city and town councils from across the state, including Providence, South Kingstown, Newport, Barrington, and Little Compton.

To learn more about us or to become part of the coalition, visit www.FairElectionsRI.org or email info@FairElectionsRI.org