

A Brief History of Clean Elections

The idea of publicly financed elections dates back to the early 20th century, when Progressive Era reformers sought to curb the undue political influence wielded by multimillionaires created during the nineteenth century's industrial revolution.

It was not until the late 1990s, however, that a successful movement emerged for full public financing of elections. Since then, the movement has continued to grow vigorously. Some form of Clean Money, Clean Campaigns, Clean Elections has passed in eight states and two municipalities—Maine, Vermont, Arizona, Massachusetts, North Carolina, New Mexico, New Jersey, and Connecticut as well as Portland, Oregon and Albuquerque, New Mexico. Clean Elections remains law in all these places with the exception of Massachusetts:

1996: By a vote of 56% to 44%, **Maine** voters approve the Clean Election Act, which provides public funding for candidates running for all state offices.

1997: The **Vermont** legislature approves public financing for candidates running for lieutenant governor and governor. The law, however, does not provide for matching funds if they are outspent by a candidate who is not participating in the program, and the courts eventually struck down the provision placing caps on all candidates' spending. This issue may ultimately be decided by the Supreme Court.

1998: **Arizona** voters pass the Arizona Citizens Clean Elections Act, establishing a system of publicly funding for candidates for statewide and state legislative offices.

Massachusetts voters approve, by a 2-1 margin, The Clean Elections Law, which provides public financing for statewide candidates.

2000: Maine and Arizona Clean Elections laws go into effect. Initiatives to establish Clean Money, Clean Elections in **Missouri** and **Oregon** are defeated.

2002: The **North Carolina** General Assembly approves the North Carolina Judicial Campaign Reform Act, which provides full voluntary public financing for candidates for the state Supreme Court and Court of Appeals.

2003: The **New Mexico** Legislature approves the "Voter Action Act," which establishes public funding for candidates running for the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission (PRC). The PRC is a five-member elected board that regulates public utilities telecommunications companies, and insurance companies as well as the registration of corporations and compliance with applicable laws.

The **Massachusetts** Legislature repeals the state's citizen-passed Clean Money, Clean Elections law after the measure is added to the budget in committee—there is no roll call vote on the repeal. Earlier, when the legislature had failed to provide funding for the program, state courts intervened to require funding for the program—if necessary by selling state property earmarked for school funding—and the legislature responded by repealing the program.

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2004: In **New Jersey**, the state legislature becomes the first in the country to enact full public financing for legislative races in passing the “Fair and Clean Elections Pilot Program.” The pilot program will be in place in two legislative districts for the November 2005 general election for Assembly. Each major party will be able to choose from a set of three districts in which it currently holds both Assembly seats, but where unaffiliated voter registration is higher than average. The program is slated to expand in 2007 to include at least four districts, primary contests and candidates for both the Senate and the General Assembly.

2005: In May, the **Portland, Oregon** City Council approves a new system of Voter Owned Elections by a vote of 4-1, making the city the first in the nation in which a legislative body has approved full public financing for its own elections. The ordinance provides full public financing for City Council and mayoral races, including matching funds to level the financial playing field.

In October, **Albuquerque, New Mexico**, voters approve the Open and Ethical Elections Code Referendum by a vote of 69 to 31 percent. The new law provides public funding to qualifying candidates who agree not to accept contributions from individuals or special interests. The program is slated to go into effect in 2007.

In December, the **Connecticut** legislature and governor approved legislation establishing full public financing of statewide and legislative races. The legislation also bans contributions from lobbyists and state contractors. The new law goes into effect for the 2008 elections.

2006: In **California**, voters reject Proposition 86, to establish a statewide program of Clean Elections. The measure also proposed to raise taxes on corporations and to tighten restrictions on campaign contributions for traditionally-financing candidates, among other provisions.

2007: **North Carolina** expands their program to include three statewide offices: Commissioner of Insurance, State Auditor, and State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

New Jersey selects three legislative districts to participate in public financing of campaigns: the 14th, 24th and 37th legislative districts. Of 20 candidates filing, 16 have been certified as Clean Elections candidates (as of 10/4/07).

New Mexico expands their program to include public financing for candidates for state supreme court.

Alaska proponents file a state ballot measure, responding to corruption where top VECO executives recently pled guilty to bribery, influence peddling and illegally funneling thousands of dollars to Alaska lawmakers. The “Alaska Clean Elections Initiative” would establish a Clean Elections program for governor, lieutenant governor, state senate and state house races. If sufficient signatures are validated by January, 2008, the proposal will be in the November, 2008 ballot in Alaska.