

# Congress must enact Fair Elections

Scratch any issue before Congress, and we find special-interest money influencing the result.

Want evidence? Consider the recent Wall Street bailouts. Or the [deregulation of the financial services industry](#), bought with \$5 billion in lobbying and campaign contributions during 1998-2008, that led to our current economic misery. Or the current debate over health care reform, where special interests are spending \$1.4 million per day in [lobbying costs](#), to influence the outcome.

In many ways, our entire system of lawmaking is increasingly for sale. It's like an auction: The bidder with the deepest pocket wins the prize.

Unfortunately, the cost of this corruption is passed along to all of us—in the form of budgets and laws that favor profiteering and special interests rather than meeting the needs of most Americans.

This is why we need fundamental reform of our campaign finance laws—in the form of [public financing](#) of campaigns, at every level.

The good news is, this change is possible. Public financing of campaigns is working in several states and cities (E.g. Maine, Arizona, Connecticut, North Carolina, and even Portland, Oregon).

It frees candidates and lawmakers from the task of dialing for dollars. It restores voter confidence that lawmakers are working for constituent voters and the common good, rather than for special interests who eagerly bankroll the campaigns in exchange for political access and favors.

In some states it's called "Clean Elections"; elsewhere it's "Voter-Owned Elections." But the principle is the same: campaigns are financed publicly, so that the financial playing field is level, and elections are decided by honest debate over issues, not by whoever can best romance wealthiest campaign backers.

When campaigns are financed publicly, there will still be lobbyists—but they won't be writing big checks at campaign fundraisers. Instead, they'll have to stand in line behind the voters.

These reforms won't be handed to us on a silver platter. We have to fight for them, through [grassroots action](#). National polls show there is [strong support](#), but citizens have to rise up and say: "We are tired of deal-making, political favors, and pay-to-play politics. We believe in government that is truly "of the people, by the people, and for the people"— and we want budget priorities and laws that represent the people rather than the profiteers.

The only way to bring that about, to buy back our democracy, is to establish public financing of campaigns, Voter-Owned Elections.

And so today, we again call on Congress to enact the [Fair Elections Now Act](#) (HR 1826, and S 752). And we urge our U.S. Senators and members of Congress to co-sponsor these bills.

More info: [www.washclean.org/bill-in-congress.htm](http://www.washclean.org/bill-in-congress.htm)

Craig Salins, Executive Director, Washington Public Campaigns, 11-11-09