



Frequently Asked Questions about Public Campaigns

Q: Under “Clean Elections,” is public financing mandatory for campaigns?

A: No, it is voluntary. Incumbents and candidates can still choose to run using their own or private money—because the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that “money is speech” and therefore, there can be no Constitutional restriction against any candidate using their own money, or private contributions, to privately fund their campaign. But there are strong benefits to running as a Clean Candidate.

Q: Then what’s the point? Why do incumbents and candidates choose to run “Clean”?

A: If incumbents or candidates opt for public financing, they voluntarily agree not to use any more of their own private money, and not to accept any private contributions—except the \$5 “qualifying” contributions from voters in their district, needed at the outset to be certified by the state regulatory commission as eligible for public financing. Then, they receive an allotment from the state fund, to fully fund their primary campaign, and later, their general campaign. It allows ordinary people with limited means to run; it frees them from “dialing for dollars” and it allows them more time with voters and issues.

And they win! Eighty-three percent (83%) of the Maine state House are now legislators who ran “Clean”.

Q: What keeps the playing field level?

A: If “Clean Elections” candidates are outspent by an opponent running on his or her own private money, they receive Matching Funds—equal to what their opponent spends - to keep the playing field level (up to a limit—three to five times the starting allotment).

Q: What about third-party (independent 527 organizations) expenditures?

A: Independent expenditures are not restricted by Arizona or Maine Clean Elections laws.

However, Clean Elections candidates receive Matching Funds, equal to what is spent by 527 organizations, to pay for a response—and these Matching Funds are available within 24 hours.

In Arizona, this feature actually has discouraged “Swift Boat” independent attack ads—because the 527 organizations by law cannot coordinate with an opponent’s campaign, yet any expenditure they make on behalf of an opposition candidate, simply has the effect of increasing the funds available to the Clean Elections candidate for their campaign. So independent groups have quickly learned to curtail their attack or opposition ads, because it ends up helping the Clean Elections candidate, through the Matching Funds feature.

Q: Does the Clean Elections law interfere in any way with funding or programs for voter education or voter registration?

A: No. Actually, in Arizona and Maine, voter education and registration programs are stronger—because the sponsoring organizations can use resources for that, which previously might have been needed for direct contributions to candidates.

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Unions, political parties, and other elections-interested organizations, love the Clean Elections program—now that they see how it works—because elections are now about people, voters, voting turnout, and issues, rather than about money and who has the deepest financial pocket.

Q: Who likes—and dislikes—Clean Elections?

A: **Incumbents love it** because they no longer need to spend time “dialing for dollars” They are free to spend their time with voters, and studying issues. In Maine, 91% of incumbents who ran “Clean” were re-elected in the recent election.

Candidates love it because they don’t have to have personal wealth to run. Clean Elections has allowed greater diversity in candidates and in views—more women, more people of color, more ordinary people from a variety of professions and backgrounds, who are not wealthy.

Small businesses love it because they are no longer “hit up” every week for contributions. Even some large companies love it—those who prefer to focus on their business rather than engaging in politics.

Most important, the voters love it because, finally, their voice is heard, and their legislator truly is accountable to voters in the district, rather than to big financial contributors.

Only those special interests—most often, corporate—that seek to skew our democracy—dislike Clean Elections, because they lose their ability to buy their own candidate or unduly influence public policy.