

# WPC – Fighting for Authentic Democracy

The mission of Washington Public Campaigns is to promote genuine democracy by ensuring that election results reflect the will of the voters, not the power of money. WPC continues to work for public financing of campaigns at every level. It's an essential means to achieve fair and "voter-owned" elections.

But it's only one of several reforms needed, and WPC is adjusting our work to fit current opportunities and conditions.

## Our activism in recent years

With the support of a few "angel" donors and a committed grassroots base, WPC has successfully raised public awareness and support for 'Clean Elections' programs similar to those actually working in several states. Our success at this despite limited resources shows that campaign finance reform is widely recognized as a key ingredient to progress on many other issues. Advocates recognize that progress on issues is stymied not simply by partisan fighting and "beltway politicking" but actually by the political influence of high-stakes moneyed interests. Furthermore, polls confirm that increasingly the public is aware of this and would support reforms, including public campaign financing if programs become publicly affordable.

## Current economic climate

But we recognize the political appetite and practicality of public campaign financing – which requires an appropriation of public funds – is diminished in a time of economic downturn when public budgets are facing severe cuts in essential services. We examined the pros and cons of mounting a citizen initiative effort to create a Clean Elections program – and concluded it was ill-advised at this time for these same reasons.

## Wake-up call

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court's ruling in the *Citizens United vs. FEC* case has been a wake-up call nationwide, that fundamental reforms – even of a constitutional nature - are needed in this country to curtail corporate power that influences every facet of our lives. It's a fight of epic proportions, affecting public policies as wide-ranging as global warming, war and peace, food and land use, job creation and health care policy – just to list a few.

## Recent survey of members

Given this evolving political environment, WPC surveyed our subscriber membership in January, 2011, to assess support for an adjustment to our mission. The result was overwhelming. **We must lead or join the fight to overturn the *Citizens United* ruling**, if necessary by means of a constitutional amendment to curtail corporate power – even as we continue to work for fair elections reforms such as public campaign financing, robust disclosure of campaign and lobbying spending, and increased information to voters. It's all related.

And WPC has responded to the survey results. We have continued to support reforms in the state legislature such as tougher PDC disclosure requirements and bills to shield the citizen initiative process from undue influence by moneyed interests. But we also developed [materials and web-based action guides](#) to support a growing movement to reclaim authentic democracy for people.

## 2011 Activism

"Reclaim Democracy for People" was chosen as the theme of the 2011 [Fifth Annual Awards Banquet](#).

- In January, WPC arranged town meeting public forums (in Spokane and Olympia) on the anniversary of the *Citizens United* court ruling, with panel discussions on what to do as citizen-activists, to mobilize for change.
- In March we arranged a public forum in Seattle, "After *Citizens United*: What Next?" – co-sponsored by the UW Law School and with an overflow crowd of 270. The panel of speakers included Enrique Cerna of KCTS-9 Public Television, Steve Breaux from WashPIRG, former state senator Claudia Kauffman, Lynne Dodson of the State Labor Council, Rabbi Alan Cook, and national leaders John Bonifaz and Jeff Clements, co-founders of Free Speech For People.org, supporting a [constitutional amendment proposed by U.S. Rep. Donna Edwards](#).

- In May, we arranged a statewide tour, "[Democracy Hijacked: From Oil Spills to Move-To-Amend](#)". The tour included public forums and campus-based presentations in seven cities: Olympia, Tacoma, Bellingham, Spokane, Wenatchee, Marysville and Seattle. Each event featured presentations by nationally-acclaimed marine biologist and oil-spill activist Dr. Riki Ott as well as WPC leaders and local issue activists. Riki Ott is known for her organizing work responding to the Exxon Valdez oil spill, the BP oil spill and as a co-founder of the national group, [Move-To-Amend.org](#), working for a broad changes to curtail corporate power.

These events, as intended, have helped to raise public awareness about the need to address "corporate personhood" – wherein the Supreme Court has extended First Amendment rights of free speech to spending by corporate entities in rulings such as *Citizens United*.

**Increasingly, voters are coming to recognize how corporate greed and influence is choking our democracy** and retarding economic recovery. In effect, public policy is purchased by Wall Street and wealthy donors, generally driven by a profit motive and using high-priced lobbyists, campaign cash and spending on voter propaganda and electioneering to influence election results and votes in Congress and the state legislature. Democracy in America – and therefore public policy – is being hijacked by money and special-interest. We need a populist uprising to fight back.

Of course, WPC continues to work for Congressional support for the [Fair Elections Now Act \(FENA\)](#) proposal and the [federal Disclose Act](#), as well as similar measures at the state level, including [public financing for state supreme court races](#) as a modest program. But we know that progress on these federal bills depends on a wider, deeper popular movement, and on further awakening by the public so that public campaign financing becomes widely-supported as a necessary tool for genuine democratic practice. And for now at the state level, **a shortage of funds in the state's budget is the chief obstacle** to enacting public campaign financing in the current economic climate.

Further, we know we must continue to "**connect the dots**" – to show that game-changing reforms in how our democracy works is necessary to progress on job creation, affordable health care, immigration, homelessness, environmental crises and similar issues.

### **Alliances for progressive activism**

To that end, we continue to seek alliances with organizations that address these specific issues. Our "Democracy Hijacked" tour was partly intended to deepen our connections with environmental activists through the involvement by Dr. Riki Ott.

**In fact we want partnerships with state and national organizations** – ([WashPIRG](#), [Public Campaign](#), [Public Citizen](#), [Common Cause](#), [Move-To-Amend](#), [Free Speech For People](#), [MoveOn.org](#), [Backbone Campaign](#) and others) – for efficiency in organizing work, relying on the strengths of various organizations and to avoid needless duplication, and to provide local presence for some of the national groups.

### **Your essential role**

We believe that informing and mobilizing citizens and building grassroots leadership is essential over the long haul. It has led to victories such as winning [approval of the Local Option law](#) in the 2008 legislative session as well as progress on campaign finance disclosure and similar reforms in 2009 and 2010, and increased lawmaker attention to the [FENA bill](#) and similar legislation proposed in Congress.

**Furthermore, fundamental reforms in public policy are impossible or not sustainable without genuine grassroots awareness, organization and mobilization.**

### **Our essential role**

WPC is the only organization in Washington State working exclusively for fair elections through public financing of campaigns and similar measures, at local, state and national levels. We have become trusted and respected for our knowledge of how these programs work, what the critical design features are, and what message framing and strategies are necessary to achieve legislative progress. Furthermore, our efforts to build coalitions – pursuing "connect-the-dots" thinking and strategies – is recognized and bearing fruit.

Change isn't easy, but it requires savvy strategies and careful research, spotting opportunities and helping voters to know where to apply citizen lobbying pressure to bring about real reforms. We believe a "tipping point" is near - brought to the forefront by U.S. Court rulings, the upcoming 2012 election season, and continued economic misery and shenanigans in the Congress – at which time the opportunities to organize around "democracy hijacked" and a new vision for America will be increased. We are working to be poised and ready for that.

Thank you for your [membership support](#) for our work!

~ Craig Salins

WPC Executive Director

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