



THE ROAD AHEAD FOR CLEAN CAMPAIGNS

Next steps in the struggle for publicly-funded campaigns

Comments by Craig Salins, Executive Director, Washington Public Campaigns 2-08

Friends, we have won a legislative victory in the 2008 session—approval of our Local Option proposal, sought for years. How sweet it is!

Now it's time to take advantage of the opportunity to create local programs, while continuing to prepare for the harder work of achieving public financing for campaigns for ALL statewide, legislative and judicial races in our state—a mission which will be tougher and which may entail a statewide ballot initiative in order to prevail.

What's next on our road ahead, for the coming year?

We know there are several cities and counties that are poised to enact or at least interested in programs of public financing for campaigns for local office. Seattle had a program (first in the nation, in 1978), and would likely create it again—although the 1970's-era program will need modernization. Some other cities/counties need it, whether a majority of the elected officials support it yet, or not—and that's why local organizing is necessary. The local work ahead simply mirrors our recent statewide advocacy work, with the added dimension of a local referendum.

Keep in mind: Campaign contributions and spending for races in Seattle and King County, last November, broke all records: For city council, county council, Seattle Port, and Seattle school board, most campaigns raised and spent upward of \$200,000—some much more. Some candidates raised that much with no opponent!—and we might ask, why? And in *every* race, the candidate who raised the most money, won. In effect, money wins. We have to change that, so that anyone can run for office without personal wealth or the backing of well-heeled donors—and so that issues of concern to ordinary households are truly addressed in the lawmaking and setting of public policy that occurs after the campaign rhetoric is over.

We also know it's an election year for all statewide and legislative officials and for three justices of the supreme court. Already the fund raising has begun, and the coming summer may see a record-breaking financial arms race and tussle for seats on the state supreme court.

We cannot forget a fundamental principle: Our impending legislative victory was brought about in no small measure because of grassroots citizen action and lobbying by supporters who were **informed, organized** and **focused** in their efforts. WPC member activity was phenomenal. In addition, we had the support and close collaboration of some organizational allies, who agreed with our objective and whose own members supported our drive.

Even though our resources are meager and staffing is minimal, we have a solid foundation of member supporters in many corners of the state (over 7,400 on our mailing list now), along with many excellent and committed volunteers, and regular chapter meetings in a few areas.

But for the work ahead, we'll need to build our organizational capacity in several ways:

- 1) Continue to grow WPC's membership base, as we reach out to neighbors and friends;
- 2) Organize stronger chapters, with clear-eyed local leadership, reaching out to allies and thoughtfully evaluating what's possible and how to use our emerging political force to achieve local change we seek—local programs.
- 3) Increase our resources, with additional professional staff to help with organizing, communications, policy research, resource development, and event planning.
- 4) Broaden our coalition contacts at the statewide level, particularly around the immediate goal of a judicial bill, but also to support longer-range plans for a comprehensive bill, either through legislative action or through a ballot initiative campaign. At every level, we know there are constituencies and organizations whose agendas are stymied because of the undue influence of money in politics. Statewide and locally, we need to reach out and listen carefully, seeking ways to collaborate with allies in the struggle for an even financial playing field in political campaigns.

So the road ahead for 2008 looks like this:

I. Take advantage of the new Local Option opportunity, to create programs of public financing for local office, in selected cities, counties and districts around the state. This will require work in Seattle and King County, perhaps Pierce County, perhaps Spokane, and perhaps other localities. Within each area, this means **designing a program** in concert with local officials, our supporters, and local coalition allies. And, it means **winning referendum campaigns** among local voters.

For this work, we need **robust local chapters**, meeting regularly, planning the political and legislative work, reaching out to educate the local public on the opportunity and the challenge using every means possible, and working in collaboration with WPC leadership at the state level and with organizational allies, so that our resources and talent are used efficiently and effectively.

WPC will likely prepare a **policy guide for local programs**, customized for local jurisdictions in Washington State, to guide the thinking, planning and decision-making at local levels in creating local programs that make sense, are affordable, and are supported by local voters.

Just think how far along our agenda will be advanced, if several programs of voter-owned campaign financing are up and running in a few cities and counties within a year or two—having been approved by local voters! What a terrific base of support for our statewide goals!

II. Organize to achieve a judicial bill—public funding for campaigns for supreme court positions—in the 2009 legislature. Obviously this is not a new proposal; indeed the governor proposed a pilot program, which WPC supported, in 2007—although at that time, there was not readiness among legislators or statewide organizations to support the program, and there was not consensus on some important details.

Since then, a new bill has been offered (HB 3336); several significant organizations have come around to support a judicial program in principle, including the state Trial Lawyers, and unofficially several large labor groups. In 2007, the national Justice At Stake organization commissioned an evaluation of Washington State, examining conditions, actors and the potential to achieve a judicial bill, and making recommendations for a campaign—and this report provides a useful road map for launching a campaign to achieve legislation. WPC expects to play a major role. We will need focused education on the issue among our supporters, especially since judicial races are not typically a dinner-table topic. And we'll need to collaborate with allies and supporters to work for consensus on a bill, its principles, features and details.

III. Investigate and evaluate options - leading to a campaign plan before the end of 2008 - for achieving public financing for statewide and legislative races. It may be too early to decide between legislative and ballot initiative options, but we should prepare for both, examining what would be required, what are the pros and cons, how ready are we, and what are the “must haves” and drop-dead dates for decision-making.

With so many election campaigns underway in 2008, and so much news focus on campaign contributions and spending, we can anticipate that the political climate for change on this issue may evolve dramatically as the year goes forward. We need to be listening, evaluating, paying attention - and taking advantage of every opportunity to educate the households of our state that there is a “better mousetrap” - programs of Clean Money / Clean Elections that are working successfully in other states, used by incumbents and candidates alike, and with popular support.

IV. Continue WPC central office support work - in public awareness/education, speakers bureau, workshops for speakers/advocates, communication with members and allies (via website, emailed newsletters and action alerts, WPC literature, DVDs), event planning (public forums, annual dinner), resource development and fund raising, research and compilation of data to support our public policy initiatives, field organizing and support to our membership.

If we want a people’s agenda to succeed, if we want candidates for office to be able to run - and win - without needing personal wealth or backing by large special-interest donors, we have to change the system by which political campaigns are financed. Public funding for campaigns is a prerequisite to progress on almost every issue we care about.

Let’s roll up our sleeves and continue the work!

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Guide and Checklist for WPC Local Chapters

The mission of local chapters in the coming months may include organizing to achieve a program of public financing of campaigns for local office, in the local city, county or district.

This can really focus the efforts of WPC members and local volunteers.

Ideally, local chapters would mirror and complement what WPC is doing statewide - in the work of coalition outreach, meeting with representatives of organizations who might become involved or at least collaborate in our work; and in public education activities, soliciting speaking opportunities, fund raising, media outreach, and similar campaign work. All of this happens best, if work plans are developed with clear objectives, and assigned to task teams or volunteers, much as a workplace staff assignment.

Here is a [checklist of ideas and tasks](#) for local chapter leadership and volunteers. In many ways, these activities are similar to any political campaign - except the "candidate" is not a person, but rather a policy proposal, namely, public financing for campaigns!

Chapter organization

- Arrange and host regular chapter meetings!—to plan chapter work, discuss objectives and work plans, volunteer recruitment, and volunteer assignments and report-backs
- Arrange periodic meet-ups and informal gatherings, as membership-development events

Outreach and public awareness

- Arrange house parties—to distribute WPC literature, DVDs, and practice and build confidence in public speaking
- WPC tabling or booths at events, fairs, gatherings
- Solicit and arrange presentations by WPC speakers, to allies and groups

Coalition-building

- Meet with potential coalition allies—organizations who may collaborate and support our issue (listen to their issues; learn about their constituency and membership; discuss ways to collaborate, to share information, to make WPC presentations or submit WPC info for their newsletters or their email lists, etc.)

Media and communications work

- Post blogs about public financing for campaigns and WPC activities
- Monitor newspaper, media and blog sites—and advise WPC members to respond
- Contact with media, through LTE's (letters to editor), meetings with editorial board, Op-Ed columns
- Arrange talk-show call-ins

Public policy initiatives—creating a local program of public funding for campaigns

- Meet with local elected leaders, seeking response to our Local Option proposals
- Research the local political climate: For example: How much is raised/spent on local races? What is the public attitude? .. and the attitude of candidates, and constituencies that want to run or support candidates?
- Research the \$ situation: What is the local public budget? Would funds be spent for a local program?
- Investigate and evaluate the likelihood of creating a local program: City or county? What would be involved? What would be the best way to introduce the proposal? to proceed with planning/designing a program? to establish a campaign to win a local voter referendum?

WPC "housekeeping" activities

- Arrange a fundraising event
- Membership work: Make calls to fill in missing membership data (for our mailing list)

[Other—fill in your ideas here!]