

Washington Public Campaigns needs your support

A track record of accomplishments:

Support from financial donors has enabled WPC to sponsor forums, events, a website with toolkit items for organizers, broadcast emails with updates and news, and outreach speakers as a way to expand public awareness of the benefits of public financing of campaigns, and to recruit and organize grassroots activists - all as a basis for legislative action.

As a result of WPC organizing, we achieved enactment of the Local Option bill in the 2008 legislative session. This enabling law ends a 16-year ban and allows cities and counties to create programs of public financing for campaigns for local office. As follow up, WPC has guided the design of a model Voter-Owned Elections program for Seattle, able to be replicated in any city or county.

The economic downturn and city/county budget deficits everywhere prevented taking advantage of the new Local Option in the past year. WPC is still working with grassroots supporters and city officials in several local areas to design and propose such programs, as fast as local politics and public budgets allow. With consulting assistance and organizing by WPC, the Seattle City Council has announced intent to adopt a program in 2010. Similar efforts are underway in Tacoma and other locales where the cost of campaigns for local office are spiraling upward – tilting elections toward money and special interest rather than voters and issues.

In 2009, recognizing budget limitations at local and state levels, WPC developed a bill for public financing of state Supreme Court campaigns, which garnered 33 co-sponsors in the state House, 9 co-sponsors in the state Senate, and a public hearing in the House. Tight state budgets trumped enactment of the judicial bill in 2009, but set the stage for likely action in 2010.

WPC also organized public awareness/support for the Fair Elections Now Act (public financing of Congressional campaigns). WPC held briefing meetings with federal lawmakers, and to date, has achieved co-sponsorship of the Act by two members of Congress from Washington.

Health care reform in Congress is the “poster-child” example of why public financing of Congressional campaigns is so necessary. WPC developed a “connect-the-dots” strategy, emphasizing that real health care reform depends on breaking the influence of special interest money in Congress. WPC sponsored three public forums on this issue (Spokane, Tacoma, Shoreline), and participated in many other public events as well. Also, WPC developed Toolkit information for organizers, linking these two advocacy campaigns. The result is that nearly every health care advocacy group in our state now supports public financing of campaigns, as well.

Continued support needed:

Continued funding for WPC is needed for general support, to pay for informational materials, website and email communications, and continued staff assistance to volunteers in public outreach, education and grassroots organizing – all as a basis for focused citizen lobbying at the local, state and federal level. We believe this strategy – informing and mobilizing the grassroots – is successful, and led to victories in winning approval of the Local Option law, as well as progress on the judicial bill and increased lawmaker attention to the FENA bill in Congress.

In the coming months, keeping an eye on our longterm goal of Clean Elections at all levels, we plan to continue work on the following:

- legislative approval of public financing of races for Washington's supreme court;
- continued efforts to establish Voter-Owned Elections programs – public financing of campaigns – in Seattle, and perhaps one or two other local cities and counties; and
- continued grassroots support for public financing of U.S. Senate and Congressional campaigns.

WPC is pursuing a political glide path to mount a statewide citizen initiative campaign for Clean Elections (public financing for legislative campaigns) in Washington State, by 2012. We recognize that success toward Clean Elections depends on increasing citizen awareness of how public campaign financing is essential for progress on many other issues of concern, such as a sustainable energy and environmental policies, affordable universal health care, and budget priorities that benefit Main Street rather than Wall Street. Also, we recognize the need to build support from organizational allies and constituencies who understand that progress on their issue – such as health care, or environmental justice, or workplace issues – depends on campaign finance reform, **public** financing of campaigns.

In addition, we are pursuing efforts to establish a sustainable base of long-term financial support from WPC activists, subscribers and organizational allies.

Public Campaign Financing – an essential strategic reform:

WPC is the only organization in Washington state working exclusively to achieve public financing of campaigns at the local, state and national level. This strategic change in how campaigns are financed is essential to progress on almost every public policy issue we face health care, energy and food/farm policy, corporate control of the media, and more – so that the needs and concerns of ordinary Americans can prevail over special interests.

Increasingly, private greed and influence is choking our democracy. Contributions flow in and political favors flow out – mostly to corporate special interests. In effect, public policy is purchased by Wall Street – by high-priced lobbyists and hints of campaign cash. We have to change it. Public funding of campaigns alters the *source* of campaign donations, eliminating the need for candidates to romance big donors. It levels the playing field and allows a wider diversity of candidates to run – people from all walks of life, regardless of their personal wealth or backing by big donors.

WPC's strategy has been to tap growing public concern, to raise awareness of the "better mousetrap" (Clean Elections) that is working in other states, and to organize and focus citizen action and grassroots lobbying around achievable victories – in the legislature, at the local level where now possible, and perhaps in Congress. Through public forums and neighborhood outreach, we are organizing supporters statewide who will take focused action as citizen lobbyists. As a result of our legislative victory in 2008, we are finding new respect from coalition allies and some office-holders. Even so, we know what we're up against: public financing threatens the status quo and influence of established political players and some funders. In a year when fund raising events abound for compelling candidates, it has been challenging to find financial support for our work.

Naturally the impact we seek is legislative and public policy victories, brought about by grassroots citizen action. Along the way we measure our impact through growth in our database (over 9,500 now), hits on our website, attendance at forums and events, participation in lobbying campaigns and local chapter work, and public endorsement of public financing by candidates and community leaders. With a very modest budget, we rely greatly on volunteers, and we are careful in the use of resources.

We believe that a citizen initiative will be necessary to achieve public financing of campaigns for the legislature and statewide offices in our state. Meanwhile, through public education, chapter-building and coalition activities, we are seeking to lay the groundwork for a broad citizen movement, one which will demand fundamental change in how campaigns are funded and the reduction of influence by lobbyists and big donors. The fight for health care reform in 2009 demonstrates what we're up against in Congress. But we know that hard-nosed and dogged organizing is necessary, to raise the political experience and savvy of advocates, to broaden our coalition relationships, and to prepare for political fights and campaigns that lie ahead.

Much information at WPC's website: www.washclean.org

Mail contributions to: Washington Public Campaigns, P.O. Box 70452, Seattle WA 98127-0452

Tax-deductible contributions can be sent to: WPC Education Fund (*same address*)