

## **Washington Public Campaigns**

**Testimony at Public Hearing re: SB 5021 - January 13, 2011**

**Senate Government Operations, Tribal Relations and Elections Committee**

Chair Senator Pridemore and members of the committee:

For the record and testifying on behalf of Washington Public Campaigns: I am Craig Salins, WPC Executive Director. Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments regarding SB 5021.

Washington Public Campaigns supports open and transparent campaign disclosure as a basic premise of fair elections. WE support this measure and urge favorable action by the committee.

Specifically, WPC supports provisions which would require open disclosure and easy determination of who is creating and funding PACs, and requiring the PAC's name to include the sponsoring group, person or organization. We support restrictions against PACs contributing to or accepting funds from other PACs. Such practices often mask the true contributors, thereby deceiving the public as to who the donors are, or at least it becomes more difficult to discover who are the original donors. We also support tougher penalties for violations of these proposed provisions.

Let me assure you that WPC has no ax to grind other than the public interest and voters' concerns for fairness in campaigns and elections. We are concerned for the health of our democracy - for the empowerment of the citizen, one-person, one-vote; and for an informed citizenry.

As you know, in recent elections we have witnessed a virtual explosion of money spent to influence election outcomes. Although direct contributions to campaigns is appropriately limited by our state's campaign contributions laws, the spending on independent electioneering is not. Furthermore, last year's Citizens United ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court opened the floodgates on electioneering spending, locally and nationwide; the financial arms race in campaign electioneering is escalating.

As a result of these trends, citizens and voters are subject to a blizzard of media ads through direct mail and the airwaves, urging the support or defeat of candidates and ballot measures. Yet we often don't know - or can't easily find out - who is trying to influence our vote, or whether the campaign literature is truthful.

Everyone knows that money is the "mother's milk" of politics. Money is perhaps the most important ingredient in election campaigns and the most significant factor in election outcomes. (In fact, for that reason as you know, our supporters statewide feel that campaigns should be financed publicly - at least as an option for candidates who qualify by at first demonstrating a certain level of community support.) Because campaign cash and spending on issue ads is so influential, citizen voters are entitled to sunlight - to know who are the financial backers of candidates and ballot measures.

Although we hope for and rely on voters to be educated on civic issues and candidates, we recognize that advertising as campaign literature or political propaganda does matter - it does influence voters. And since ads need not be truthful, voters are entitled to know who is paying for campaign ads, who is providing support or opposing the candidates and ballot measures.

Citizens should not need training from Sherlock Holmes in order to decipher who is serving up campaign propaganda and trying to influence their vote. Indeed, it should be transparent - by law and public policy. It is the job of the legislature to make it so.

As a comparison: We in America believe in marketplace fairness to the consumer. We have laws against false advertising. In fact, the Federal Trade Commission was created by law to prohibit "unfair and deceptive acts or practices in commerce." Is our role as citizen-voters in our democracy any less deserving of advocacy than our role as consumers in the economic marketplace?

We support fair elections and tough campaign disclosure laws, and we urge approval of SB 5021.

Thank you.