

Washington Public Campaigns


washclean.org

Why Public Financing of Election Campaigns?

Democracy in America is threatened. Increasingly, ordinary citizens have lost their influence over lawmaking and public policy, because candidates must raise huge sums to run for office, and because our elected representatives—often concerned about financing their next campaign—tend to follow the bidding of big donors rather than the true interests of voters in their district. The result is public policies that often fail to meet the needs and desires of most Americans.

Furthermore, citizens are increasingly cynical and jaded toward our political system and politicians, with declining participation in our democracy and low turnout in voting. People say, “What’s the use?”

We need full public financing of election campaigns—so that candidates who represent the people can afford to run, and so that once in office, elected representatives are not obligated to special interests and their lobbyists, for fear of losing campaign contributions. This won’t solve all of our problems, but will go a long way to breaking the link between big donors and public officials and to restoring democracy to the people. This is fundamental to getting government “of, by, and for the people.”

This work is not just a pipe dream. The states of Maine and Arizona have led the way, adopting public financing of election campaigns through citizen initiatives, in 1996 and 1998, respectively. Each year in those states, more candidates choose to run with what is called Clean Money, Clean Elections. Today, over three-fourths of the members of the Maine state legislature were elected through clean elections. And in these states, there is higher voter turnout, wider discussion of important issues, and tough new laws on issues such as prescription drug prices, universal health care, and closing unneeded tax breaks.

Washington Public Campaigns is organizing toward public financing of all election campaigns in Washington. We want to launch a statewide conversation about how we might reclaim our democracy—and our voice—through public financing of campaigns, to limit the influence of money in lawmaking. There are several bills under consideration by the 2007 state legislature. We are working with key legislators and attending hearings on the proposals. If it appears unlikely the legislature will act, we are considering a citizen initiative.

Also, we want the Legislature to remove language in state law that prohibits cities and other local jurisdictions from using public funds for local election campaigns. In the past, Seattle used public financing for city council races. However, in 1992, voters approved Initiative 134—touted as “campaign financing reform,” but which contained fine print that outlawed using public funds in any fashion for state **and local** campaigns. Some local jurisdictions today would experiment with their own public financing programs, if only state law were changed to allow it.

We can do it here—but grassroots support is essential!

- Talk with friends and neighbors. Explain how public financing of campaigns can restore our voice.
- Write letters to your local paper, expressing support.
- Ask your local legislators to support public financing of campaigns, to eliminate “dialing for dollars” and to restore our citizen voice in lawmaking and public policy.
- Join Washington Public Campaigns as a supporting member. Sign up, to receive periodic updates.
- Become a Clean Elections Organizing Team leader in your legislative district.
- Make a contribution toward our expenses for voter education, lobbying and local organizing.
- **Join us in this effort!** Visit washclean.org for more information.

Together, we can reclaim our voice—and our democracy!