

# **We need Voter-Owned Election Campaigns!**

## **Public Financing for political campaigns for local office**

A newly-enacted state law allows cities and counties to create programs that offer public funds for local political campaigns. Similar Voter-Owned Elections (VOE) programs are working in other areas.

Under these programs, anyone who qualifies by showing a modest level of voter support (described below) can receive public funds sufficient to run a credible primary campaign. In exchange, they agree to accept no other private contributions—so they are beholden to no private or special interest.

### **Voter-Owned Elections (publicly-financed) are needed and overdue!**

Every year, the financial arms race in campaign spending gets worse. Last year in Seattle and King County, candidates for local office raised and spent on average over \$200,000 in campaign expenses. Only the wealthy (or those backed by big donors) can afford to run for office—and once elected, they face pressure or a presumption of payback to do the bidding of wealthy contributors whose money might be needed for a re-election campaign. It doesn't need to be this way!

**Elections should be about issues and voters**, not about who can raise the most money! Campaigns are part of our democratic process. They should be funded publicly, so that:

- Any qualified candidate can run regardless of their wealth or connections.
- Voters get wider choice among candidates: more women, more ethnic and economic diversity.
- Lawmakers and elected officials—and their votes—are indebted to NO special interest.
- Lawmakers work on voters' issues, rather than romancing big donors. No more "dialing for dollars"!

### **How would it work?**

**Candidates qualify by demonstrating community support.** They must collect a set number of signatures, along with a small qualifying contribution (generally \$5) from each signer. These signatures and qualifying contributions are turned in to be validated by a Voter-Owned Elections Commission.

If the required numbers are reached, candidates receive a campaign allotment check in an amount (specified by law) sufficient to run a primary campaign. In exchange, they promise to accept no more private contributions and to use none of their personal funds, using only the public funds provided.

Candidates who win the primary receive an additional allotment to campaign for the general election.

If VOE-participating candidates are outspent by a privately-financed opponent, they receive matching or "fair fight" funds, dollar for dollar up to a set amount, to keep the financial playing field level for all candidates. Third-party ads—so-called "Swift Boat" electioneering—also trigger matching funds.

**It's affordable!—less than \$5 per resident, per year.** Isn't it worth it?—so that campaigns are accessible to every good candidate, and elections are about issues and voters, not about money.

Portland has a Voter-Owned Elections program for mayor and city council races—and it's very successful and popular. Clean Elections programs are working in Maine, Arizona, and other states!

### **How can we bring Voter-Owned Elections (VOE) to our city/county?**

**The governing council must design a VOE program**, and enact an ordinance to establish it.

Washington Public Campaigns can help cities and counties to design a workable VOE program.

Then by state law, **the program must be submitted to voters for their approval**, in a referendum.

If a program is enacted by July, it can be on the ballot in November—and if approved, it could be available for use by candidates for city or county elected positions in 2009.

### **Join our grassroots campaign for Voter-Owned Elections in Washington State!**

Tell your friends and neighbors—*Let's do this! Voter-Owned Elections in our town!*

More info on our website, [washclean.org](http://washclean.org) ■ **Washington Public Campaigns** ■ 206-784-2522