

## WHY SENIORS SHOULD SUPPORT “CLEAN ELECTIONS” PUBLIC FUNDING OF CAMPAIGNS

Dorothy Preston, 83, of Parkville suffered a stroke last year, requiring her to use a walker. The stroke also requires her to take expensive prescription drugs. Pricier and pricier drugs.

"Most seniors talk about the same damn thing, and nothing is being done about it," her husband Maurice told the *Baltimore Sun*. "Prescription drugs just keep going up."

Dorothy can still afford to buy her drugs. For now. But other Marylanders are more vulnerable. Over 600,000 uninsured Marylanders, 200,000 seniors whose health insurance lacks a prescription drug benefit, and millions of Marylanders with stingy health insurance can face excruciating choices between prescription drugs or car payments, drugs or rent, even drugs or food.

Our elected officials in Annapolis took a modest step forward in 2001 when they voted to provide a mere \$20 million per year to subsidize purchases of prescription drugs.

But this Maryland law is not nearly as comprehensive as the “Maine Rx Plan”. In Maine, the state – which of course has much more bargaining leverage than individual consumers vis-à-vis the giant pharmaceutical companies -- negotiates lower group prices on behalf of those residents who lack prescription drug coverage. And if Big Pharma refuses to cooperate? The state of Maine gets tough by:

- publishing the names of uncooperative companies in local newspapers and in newsletters sent to doctors;
- requiring doctors to get authorization from a state official before prescribing a drug that is made by a non-cooperating company; and, if these fail to work,
- requiring rebates reflecting the discounts from all companies selling drugs to Maine residents.

Why doesn't Maryland get tough with Big Pharma the way Maine does?

### **Follow the Money Trail**

Because Maryland lawmakers don't want to offend their deep-pocket campaign contributors. Multinational corporations such as Pfizer, Bayer, and Eli Lilly contributed thousands and thousands of dollars in the 2002 election, directing the lion's share to the most powerful incumbents. How much did Dorothy Preston contribute to politicians in that same election? \$0. Whose voice is louder in Annapolis?

And Big Pharma is only one of many special interests gouging seniors. Happy with your HMO? Why doesn't Maryland require HMOs to guarantee access to specialists, eliminate restrictions on doctor-patient communications, and ban limitations on prescription drugs that doctors consider necessary? Do you think the big-dollar campaign contributions from HMOs and medical insurance companies in the last election help explain our lawmakers' refusal to enact tough HMO reform in Maryland?

## **Towards a Solution: “Clean Elections” Public Funding of Campaigns**

To level the playing field in Annapolis, we need to reduce the power of the Big Money special interests in Maryland politics – interests that contributed approximately \$75 million to politicians in the 2002 election, double what they spent in 1998.

Strict limits on fundraising and expenditures would accomplish this goal. But the Supreme Court refuses to countenance mandatory campaign expenditure limits, calling them a violation of free speech.

It is futile to tinker around the edges of a campaign finance system whose main features the courts declare sacrosanct. We need to adopt a proven alternative to that system. That alternative is Clean Elections campaign finance reform as practiced in Arizona and Maine. Here’s how it works:

- To participate, a candidate must demonstrate broad community support by collecting a large number of small contributions in the district he wishes to represent. For example, in Arizona, where Clean Elections is already law, candidates must collect several hundred \$5 contributions from voters in the district they wish to represent.
- If successful, the candidate receives enough money from the public Treasury to wage a competitive campaign.
- If a privately financed opponent outspends him, he receives offsetting funds to keep pace, up to a certain limit.

### Advantages of Clean Elections:

- It enables citizens with community support but ordinary financial means to run for office.
- By encouraging electoral competition, public funding widens debate.
- It frees candidates and lawmakers from incessant fundraising, removing the appearance and reality of corruption.
- Participation in the publicly funded system is voluntary; by leaving the private campaign finance system alone, the Act is immune to judicial challenge.
- In Maine and Arizona, the number of candidates who participate in the system doubles with each election cycle. In 2002, a majority of candidates in both states financed their campaigns solely with public funds; both incumbents and challengers used the system; and participation cut across party lines.
- Clean Elections candidates who win owe nothing to fat cat contributors, reducing the latter’s privileged access in Annapolis. With lawmakers free from the undue influence of Big Money special interests, they are much more likely to support reforms that seniors need.
- Maryland’s Clean Elections system would cost less than \$2 per resident per year – a small price to pay for real democracy and significantly less than the current system, which lavishes pork on special interest contributors.
- *Clean Elections reform has already been implemented in Maine and Arizona, where it is accomplishing all the benefits described above. Indeed, Arizona just joined Maine as one of only two states to pass comprehensive prescription drug legislation. Could these reforms have happened without first reducing the influence of the HMOs and pharmaceutical companies?*

## **In 2004, We Have an Unprecedented Opportunity To Enact Clean Elections Reform in Maryland**

In 2002, the General Assembly passed a bill to create an official task force to examine Clean Elections reform and make recommendations for Maryland. This distinguished study commission, chaired by the Dean of Liberal Arts at the University of Baltimore, Carl Stenberg, will issue its final report in the autumn of 2003. The Stenberg Commission has already decided to recommend in favor of Clean Elections reform. Now it is finalizing a detailed draft statute, which it will submit shortly to the General Assembly.

Considering its distinguished membership, exhaustive deliberations, and what will surely be a persuasive report, the Stenberg Commission could do for campaign finance reform what the Thornton Commission did for public schools. The Stenberg report comes at the perfect time to enact major reform:

- **Everybody Agrees That Maryland Suffers from a Campaign Finance Problem.** The 2002 election cycle was by far the most expensive in Maryland's history. Special interests contributed \$75 million – double what they spent in 1998. Since 1990, the gubernatorial inflation rate has skyrocketed 726%. During the 2002 campaign, the media reported incessantly on the unprecedented sums of money spent. At least \$1 million in contributions from the gambling industry alone – timed to influence the high profile fight over legalization of slot machines -- has reinforced the general consensus that Maryland suffers from a campaign finance problem. Even the FBI is investigating the campaign finance mess in Annapolis.
- **Strong Support from the Media.** The *Washington Post* and *Baltimore Sun* both support Clean Elections reform, so editorials and newspaper stories will create a pro-Stenberg climate that lawmakers will find difficult to ignore.
- **Key Lawmakers Either Support Clean Elections or are Persuadable.** Gov. Ehrlich says he supports public funding of campaigns. The two committee chairs who will consider the bill (Del. Hixson and Sen. Hollinger) are sympathetically inclined. Senate President Mike Miller has not ruled out support for the Stenberg recommendation (and, because of the FBI investigation, can not simply torpedo it). Speaker Mike Busch is a progressive Democrat who will give this issue a fair-minded hearing.
- **Clean Elections Will Help Close the Budget Deficit.** Over the past year, Progressive Maryland and allies have demanded closure of hundreds of millions of dollars in corporate tax loopholes as the best way to balance the state's budget. A focus on loopholes, in turn, has prompted the natural question: "How did they get there?" And this question, in turn, is giving advocates of Clean Elections one of our strongest arguments in favor of reform: tax loopholes are payola to deep-pocket campaign contributors. If Maryland wants to climb out of this budget deficit and achieve more fiscal discipline in the future, the single best step we can take is to enact Maine-style campaign finance reform.
- **Clean Elections is Incumbent-Friendly.** When incumbent lawmakers learn how the system works in Maine and Arizona, they will see that this reform is in their self-interest. Already in Maine and Arizona, most incumbents use the publicly funded system. And in both states 90% of incumbents still win re-election (as they do in Maryland). Why? Because incumbents enjoy plenty of other advantages besides a fundraising edge. They have superior name-recognition, more contacts among activists, better campaign skills, more experience, a proven track record, etc. Incumbents in both states like the system because it eliminates the worst aspect of their job, fundraising, and frees them after the election to vote their conscience – not as contributors and lobbyists demand.

In the upcoming session of the General Assembly, Maryland has a once-in-a-decade opportunity to enact a major reform to help seniors. That's why seniors should make enactment of the Stenberg recommendation a top priority in the 2004 session of the General Assembly. Join the growing movement in Maryland to bring Clean Elections to our state, a movement that includes the AARP, Alliance of Retired Americans, League of Women Voters, United Methodist Church, American Jewish Congress, NAACP, Sierra Club, Progressive Maryland, AFL-CIO, Common Cause/Maryland, and many other groups. **To get involved, contact Sean Dobson of Progressive Maryland at [sean@progressivemaryland.org](mailto:sean@progressivemaryland.org) or 301.495.7004.**

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