

WHY WOMEN SHOULD SUPPORT “CLEAN ELECTIONS” PUBLIC FUNDING OF CAMPAIGNS

Poll after poll shows that most Marylanders support a woman's right to choose, greater availability of family planning services, stronger protections against domestic abuse, liberalized family leave policies, and other family- and woman-friendly policies.

Yet, time and again, our lawmakers in Annapolis kill commonsense bills that would help women and their families. In the past few years, the General Assembly has shot down bills to:

- Extend unemployment benefits to individuals who voluntarily take a leave of absence of up to 12 weeks from their jobs after the birth or adoption of a child;
- Prohibit law enforcement officials from requiring a rape victim to take a polygraph examination. Other crime victims are not subjected to such treatment. Why should rape victims be humiliated in this manner?
- Remove firearms from abusive spouses if identified as such in a protective order;

Why do pro-woman, pro-family bills like these die in a progressive state such as Maryland?

Follow the Money Trail

Bills of special concern to women would, of course, pass more often if there were more female lawmakers. Unfortunately, women comprise only 19% of the membership of the General Assembly.

Why do women have such trouble running for and winning office? The name of the game in electoral politics is money. Without it, a prospective candidate cannot even think about running for office. But women, who on average are poorer than men and often lack connections in the business world, have trouble raising money. If a woman contemplates challenging a male incumbent, here is what she must consider: In Maryland's 1998 election, the typical female challenger raised, on average, \$23,731 while the typical male incumbent raised, on average, \$73,419. Is it any surprise that so few women decide to run for office?

One reason female candidates lack access to campaign cash is because so few women donate. In that same election, men gave 61 percent more campaign dollars than did women when compared head-to-head.

Because women contribute so little, they also lack access to politicians after the election, in turn making it difficult to enact bills of special concern to them. In 1998, individual women donated only 14 percent of big-dollar contributions.

The Solution: Clean Elections Campaign Finance Reform

If privileged access to campaign cash represents one of the main electoral advantages men have over women, strict limits on fundraising and expenditures seem to offer the surest way to level the playing field. 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 reform. 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 she wishes to represent within a specified amount of time.
- If successful, she receives enough money from the public Treasury to wage a competitive campaign.
- If a privately financed opponent outspends her, she receives offsetting funds to keep pace, up to a certain limit.

Advantages of Clean Elections Reform:

- It enables citizens with community support but ordinary financial means to run for office.
- By encouraging electoral competition, Clean Elections reform widens debate. Policies formerly dismissed as “unrealistic” – universal health care, universal childcare, living wages – get a hearing.
- It frees candidates and lawmakers from incessant fundraising, removing the appearance and reality of corruption.
- Participation in the Clean Elections 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 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.
- Publicly funded candidates who win owe nothing to fat cat contributors, reducing the latter's privileged access in Annapolis.
- Maryland's Clean Elections system will 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, not least enabling more female candidates to run for office and win.*

That's right, Clean Elections reform enables more women to run for office and win. In Arizona's 2000 election – the very first time Clean Elections was ever implemented -- fully 31% of women candidates chose to run publicly funded campaigns. In Maine in 2000, women ran Clean Elections campaigns at a rate of 44%, nearly double that of their male counterparts. 87% of women running publicly funded campaigns in both states said they would not have sought office at all without public funding. Maine's Deborah Simpson, a waitress and single mother, got elected state representative. Would that have happened under the normal rules of campaign finance? In 2002 in Arizona, Janet Napolitano used the system to get elected Governor. 62% of women candidates in Arizona used the system, 57% of Latino candidates and 100% of African American candidates, according to a study by the Piper Fund.

If you believe that passing pro-woman, pro-family legislation depends on getting more women elected, then Clean Elections should be your primary political objective. It's not one of many reforms to pursue: it's **the** reform that enables all others.

In 2004, Progressives 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 pumped \$75 million into that election, 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. Sheila Hixson and Paul Sen. Hollinger, are sympathetically inclined. Senate President Mike Miller has not ruled out support for the Stenberg recommendation (and, because of the FBI investigation, he 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, the League of Women Voters, 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 corporate 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. In Maine and Arizona, almost half of 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 over challengers 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 corporate lobbyists demand).

The League of Women Voters, Maryland NOW, and the Maryland Commission for Women already endorse public funding of campaigns. But because there exists this year a realistic shot of enacting it, women 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 Maryland NOW, League of Women Voters, Maryland Commission for Women, Progressive Maryland, NAACP, AARP, Sierra Club, Common Cause/Maryland, American Jewish Congress, and dozens of other groups. **To get involved, contact Sean Dobson of Progressive Maryland at sean@progressivemaryland.org or 301.495.7004.**

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