

POWER TO VOTERS, NOT SPECIAL INTEREST CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTORS

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

Dorothy Preston, 83, of Parkville recently suffered a stroke and now has 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. Last year, Gov. Ehrlich announced his intention to cut the program.

Maryland's modest and shrinking program pales in comparison to the "Maine Rx Plan". In Maine, the state – which of course has much more bargaining leverage than do individual consumers vis-à-vis the giant pharmaceutical companies -- negotiates lower group prices on behalf of residents who lack prescription drug coverage. And if Big Pharma refuses to cooperate? The state of Maine gets tough by requiring rebates.

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 drug companies 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? Might lawmakers reluctance to get tough with HMOs have something to do with the hundreds of thousands of dollars HMOs and insurance companies contribute to elected officials each election?

TOWARDS A SOLUTION: “CLEAN ELECTIONS” PUBLIC FUNDING OF CAMPAIGNS

Public funding of campaigns makes it possible to pass laws to benefit all the voters, not just the HMOs, pharmaceutical companies, and other special interests that fund the campaigns of elected officials.

Public funding of campaigns is already law in Maine and Arizona, where it has worked well through three election cycles. And Connecticut just enacted it in 2005. It is a proven, sensible way to change the status quo so that voters can take back control of politics and make elected officials accountable.

Here's how it works:

- To participate in the voluntary, publicly funded system, a candidate must demonstrate broad community support by collecting several hundred small contributions in the district he wishes to represent.
- If successful, he receives enough money from the public Treasury to wage a competitive campaign and agrees to accept no private, special-interest donations.
- If a privately financed opponent outspends him, he receives offsetting funds to keep pace, up to a certain limit.

Advantages of Public Funding of Campaigns

- It enables citizens with community support but ordinary financial means to run for office.
- It frees candidates and lawmakers from incessant fundraising, giving them more time to listen to regular voters.
- Participation in the publicly funded system is voluntary; by leaving the private campaign finance system alone, the Act is immune to judicial challenge.
- Publicly funded candidates who win owe nothing to the insurance companies, energy companies, and other special interests that fund campaigns under the current system. In this way, public funding of campaigns reduces the undue influence of the special interests in Annapolis.
- Maryland's publicly funded system would cost about \$1.30 per resident per year – a reasonable price to pay so that voters can take back control of politics and make elected officials more accountable.
- *Public funding of campaigns has already been implemented in Maine and Arizona, where it is accomplishing all the benefits described above.*

In Arizona, for example, the first act of newly elected Gov. Janet Napolitano was to cap the skyrocketing cost of prescription drugs by ordering the state to purchase drugs in bulk. Maine instituted a similar program, described above, and also became the first state in the country to enact universal health care. Can you imagine these reforms happening without first weaning elected officials from their financial dependence on the HMOs, pharmaceuticals, and insurance companies?

IN 2006, SENIORS HAVE AN UNPRECEDENTED OPPORTUNITY TO HELP ENACT PUBLIC FUNDING OF CAMPAIGNS IN MARYLAND

In 2002, the General Assembly passed a bill to create an official task force to examine public funding of campaigns and make recommendations for Maryland. This distinguished, bipartisan study commission, whose members included several former and current lawmakers, issued its report in 2004, recommending in favor of public funding of campaigns for General Assembly races. Sen. Paul Pinsky and Del. Jon Cardin will submit legislation in the 2006 session of the General Assembly based on the study commission plan. This legislation comes at the perfect time to enact major reform:

- **The Special Interests Are Pumping More and More Money into Maryland Politics.** The banking industry, energy industry, and other special interests pumped \$75 million into Maryland's 2002 election, doubling what they had spent in 1998 and making 2002 by far the most expensive election in the state's history. And the 2006 election will surely break that record. Since 1990, the gubernatorial inflation rate has skyrocketed 726%. No wonder a recent poll of Marylanders found that 75% believe that fundraising is a major source of corruption.
- **Strong Support Statewide for Public Funding of Campaigns.** An October 2005 statewide poll shows 73% of Marylanders support Arizona-style public funding of campaigns. Progressive Maryland, the League of Women Voters, Common Cause, NAACP, Sierra Club, AFL-CIO, League of Conservation Voters, NOW, and other organizations endorse the bill. The *Washington Post* and *Baltimore Sun* both support public funding of campaigns.
- **Key Lawmakers Support Public Funding of Campaigns.** More than 50 lawmakers cosponsored the bill in 2005. Speaker Mike Busch supports the reform, as does Chairwoman Sheila Hixson, whose Ways & Means committee voted for the bill 14-5 last year. Sen. Paula Hollinger and a majority of her colleagues on the Education, Health & Environmental Affairs committee – which has jurisdiction on this issue -- support the reform.
- **Public Funding of Campaigns Will Help Save the State Money.** Over the past three years, Progressive Maryland has demanded closure of hundreds of millions of dollars in corporate tax loopholes as the best way to balance the state's budget and pay for schools and health care. 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 public funding of campaigns one of our strongest arguments: tax loopholes are payola to corporate campaign contributors. If Maryland wants to close its long-term budget deficit and achieve more fiscal discipline in the future, the single best step we can take is to enact Maine-style public funding of campaigns.
- **Public Funding is Incumbent-Friendly.** As incumbent lawmakers learn how the system works in Maine and Arizona (and now also Connecticut), they understand that this reform is in their self-interest. Already 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). That's why incumbents in Connecticut voted overwhelmingly in 2005 to enact this reform into law.