

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 Public Funding of Campaigns

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 – already law in Maine, Arizona and Connecticut -- 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.
- 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 (Connecticut just enacted the reform, so it has not been used there yet in an election).
- 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 about \$1.30 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. And Connecticut just enacted the reform into law in 2005.*

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 2006, FEMINISTS 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.