

Elected Leaders for Clean Elections

As an elected official, you know that campaign costs are soaring higher and the chase for campaign money is out of control. Elections too often resemble auctions, with the victory going to the biggest spender.

Even the most dedicated public servants find they must devote increasing amounts of time to fund-raising, leaving less time to tend to the voters' business. Those without access to money are simply squeezed out.

A growing number of public officials are joining frustrated voters in calling for serious campaign finance reform. We can reduce the influence of money in politics by giving candidates an alternative way to run that frees them from the money chase and puts voters, not donors, in charge of elections.

Maine, Arizona and North Carolina now offer such an alternative, called Clean Elections, or publicly financed elections. The system lets candidates receive enough public funds to run a competitive campaign if they:

- show strong support by collecting a set number of signatures and small donations from voters in the district;
- accept strict spending limits; and

- take no private money except the small, qualifying donations.

Of the \$90 million raised by all SC state candidates in the last nine years, less than 1 percent came from contributions of \$200 or less.

Giving the most were business interests: primarily banking, insurance, real estate, lawyers, health, construction, utilities, transportation, communication and agriculture. Candidates themselves contributed nearly 20 percent.

- The average cost of winning a Senate seat rose nearly 100 percent between 1996 and 2004 (from \$51,537 to \$95,394).

- The average cost of winning a House seat rose 25 percent between 1998 and 2004 (\$20,027 to \$24,954).

- SC lead the nation with 72% uncontested legislative seats in the 2002 general election.

- 95 percent of the winners in the 2004 general election were the candidates who raised the most money.

- 90 percent of the winners were incumbents.

- 98 percent of the winners were either incumbents, spent the most money, or both.

In January 2009, the Clean Elections

Act was introduced (S-438 & H-3520), with bipartisan support, in the SC legislature to provide public financing for candidates to the General Assembly and statewide offices.

The cost—less than one penny a day per voter—would require no tax increase and, in fact, would save the tax money sometimes wasted on special-interest donors. A bill for a pilot program (S-440 and H-3519) was also introduced in 2009.

The Clean Elections system is voluntary and, as such, is constitutional. Voters in South Carolina are ready for this change; 65 percent told USC pollsters they would support publicly financed elections. In South Carolina, a coalition of civic-minded groups called Voters for Clean Elections is working to educate the public and elected officials on Clean Elections as a viable system. As an important step in the process, the coalition is gathering statements of support from elected officials in South Carolina.

Fundamental change in the way we finance major campaigns cannot come without leadership from elected officials themselves. Please join the growing number of elected officials in South Carolina and across the nation in supporting Clean Elections.

Support Statement for Clean Elections

As an elected official, I am concerned about the increasingly dominant role that money plays in elections. I join other leaders in South Carolina and across the nation in supporting Clean Elections programs that offer a voluntary, alternative way to finance campaigns for public office. Under such a program, candidates could receive a competitive amount of public funding to run for office IF they first demonstrate support from voters (by gathering small donations from a set number of eligible voters), agree to strict spending limits, and reject all private donations.

Signed: _____

Print name: _____

Office held: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Return completed form to: SC Progressive Network, PO Box 8325, Columbia SC 29202 or Fax 803-808-3781. For more information on Clean Elections, see www.scpronet.com.