



League of Women Voters of Illinois
Testimony for the Joint Committee on Government Reform
Tuesday, March 17, 2009

The League of Women Voters has been working on the issue of Campaign Finance Reform for decades. We first became active on this issue on the national level in the early 1970's during the Watergate era and on the state level since the mid 1990s initiating a contributions limits bill in the spring 1999 legislative session.

We have never seen the public so focused on this issue as they are now; nor have we seen them as disgusted by the cesspool that Illinois politics has become following the conviction and incarceration of one Illinois governor and the recent impeachment of another. The root of these problems is the Role that Big Money plays in Illinois. It is time to take the money out of Illinois politics!

Two weeks ago I attended a Town Hall Meeting in my hometown of Glencoe, sponsored by my State Senator and State Representative. The room in the library was packed which is not the case at many town hall meetings and in a meeting, that lasted a bit over an hour, about ½ hour was spent talking about the role that money plays in politics. People were begging for campaign finance reform. Their biggest concern was that contributions being made by big money interests (such as corporations and unions) influence their legislators' votes and they do not have a real voice. They also feel that the scandal that has resulted from the role that money plays in politics has diverted the attention of the legislature and kept it from solving the big problems of the state.

The legislature is fully aware of what needs to be done, what legislation must become law and what the public is demanding; actual campaign finance reform, transparency and commitment to enforce the laws. Various reform proposals have been floating around for years; including these which we think are particularly important **campaign contribution limits** and **public financing**.

By adopting a reasonable set of campaign finance regulations, Illinois will level the political playing field so that big campaign donors cannot drown out the voice of the public during policy debates. An evenly enforced, fair contribution limits system will help restore public faith in government by ensuring citizens are heard, enhancing competition by leveling the playing field, and providing protection from public corruption. But to assure success, it is imperative that meaningful enforcement is provided and implemented. **This will not be easy, but the time for change is now and not next year. It is not time for a band aid approach. It is time to cure corruption.**

Our 30-year experiment in Illinois with a completely unregulated campaign finance system has been an unmitigated disaster. To continue to say that "disclosure" will solve

this problem is completely disingenuous. “Disclosure” is what we’ve had for the past 35 years.

We need:

- Limits on contributions from individuals to candidates, political parties and PACs.
- Restrictions on how much money an individual, PAC or group can give to candidates during election cycles.
- Limits on transfers from parties and political committees to a candidate.
- A strict limit, if not a complete prohibition, on direct contributions from businesses and unions.

Campaign contribution limits with **Real Enforcement** is a necessity.

Ultimately to restore public faith in government, enable candidates to compete more equitably for public office and allow maximum citizen participation in the political process a system of **Public Financing** is needed. In recent years we have had a hard time finding good people to run for the state legislature because they have to raise so much money under the current system. With a public financing system a person of modest means but a lot of initiative and community support would be encouraged to run for office because they could run a viable campaign by raising small contributions. Additionally, a public financing system makes people feel that a small donation counts and engages them in the system.

In 1998 one of my friends ran for State Senate. Her husband, an attorney, could easily ask his colleagues to make substantial contributions to her campaign. My husband, a high school teacher, could not do that. But raising smaller contributions would be possible and with matching funds received from Public Financing the campaign would be viable.

Our message to our own members and to the public is that the top priority of each of our legislators must be campaign finance reform.

If the legislature doesn’t get big, unregulated contributions out of our elections, they are not passing genuine reform!

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