

**Campaign Legal Center • Common Cause • Democracy 21
League of Women Voters • Public Citizen • U.S. PIRG**

February 7, 2007

Dear Representative,

Our organizations urge you to co-sponsor H.R. 776, legislation to fix the presidential public financing system that was introduced last week by Representatives Marty Meehan (D-MA), Christopher Shays (R-CT) and David Price (D-NC).

The organizations include the Campaign Legal Center, Common Cause, Democracy 21, the League of Women Voters, Public Citizen and U.S. PIRG.

H.R. 776 also has been endorsed by the Committee for Economic Development, an organization of national business leaders and educators, and by Americans for Campaign Reform, an organization whose bipartisan leadership includes former Senators Bill Bradley (D-NJ), Warren Rudman (R-NH), Bob Kerrey (D-NE), and Alan Simpson (R-WY).

The presidential public financing system was established in 1974 in the wake of the Watergate scandals. The system was created to take the presidency off the auction block, to provide presidential candidates with the resources necessary to run competitive races, and to limit the arms race spending in presidential campaigns.

According to a *New York Times* editorial (February 6, 2007):

Once upon a time, Washington managed to fully confront a corruption scandal and invent a government solution that actually worked for 30 years. The scandal was Watergate. The solution was the innovative option of providing public financing to presidential campaigns as a means of curbing the influence of big money donors like those who ran amok in President Richard Nixon's 1972 re-election.

The presidential public financing system served the nation well for most of its existence. The system is now broken, however, and needs to be fixed.

For example, with Congress failing to make any adjustments in the presidential public financing system since it was enacted in 1974, the spending limits for the presidential primaries are far too low today to accommodate the costs of running a modern presidential primary campaign.

As a result, we face a presidential election in 2008 where the two major party nominees are expected to reject public financing and to spend a combined *\$1 billion* in private campaign contributions for their primary and general election races.

In order to raise these massive sums of money, furthermore, big-money fundraisers, or “bundlers,” will play a preeminent role in the presidential campaigns.

The influence-seeking big money donors of the 1972 Watergate-era presidential race will be influence-seeking big money bundlers in the 2008 presidential election.

As a *Washington Post* editorial (February 5, 2006), noted about big-money fundraisers, “candidates are as indebted to the \$1 million bundler as they are to the \$1 million check writer.”

In addition, the absence of an effective presidential public financing system will provide an enormous financial advantage to well-known frontrunners, while other candidates will have a very difficult time raising sufficient funds to run competitive races.

Every president elected since 1976 used the public financing system to pay for his general election campaign, including Presidents Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. All of these presidents, except the current President Bush, also used the system to pay for their primary elections.

Almost all of the Democratic and Republican primary candidates from 1976 to 2004 also used the system to finance their presidential primary races.

The system has promoted competitive races, with challengers winning three of the six races run under the presidential funding system that involved incumbent presidents.

It is essential to the health and integrity of our democracy that we repair the presidential public financing system for the future. It is imperative to avoid having the presidency placed on a permanent auction block, and presidential candidates being engaged in a never-ending arms race for massive amounts of private contributions.

While H.R. 776 will not take effect until 2009, reflecting practical realities, enacting the legislation in this Congress is critical to protecting the integrity of the presidency and our democracy for post-2008 presidential elections.

A summary of H.R. 776 is enclosed

We strongly urge you to co-sponsor H.R. 776 and to take all possible steps to help pass the legislation in this Congress.

Campaign Legal Center
Common Cause
Democracy 21

League of Women Voters
Public Citizen
U.S. PIRG