

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

February 15, 2008

Dear Senator Obama,

Our organizations are deeply concerned about recent statements by your campaign spokesperson, Bill Burton, regarding the commitment you made last year to participate in the public financing system in the presidential general election if nominated by your party and if your major party opponent also agrees to use public financing in the general election.

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

The presidential public financing system was established to protect the integrity of the presidency and the interests of the American people. Every Democratic and Republican nominee for president since 1976 has used the public financing system for their general election campaigns.

According to *Politico* (February 14, 2008), Mr. Burton stated that the commitment you made last year is an “option,” not a pledge.

Mr. Burton further said, “the only reason this is an option is because we pursued the decision from the FEC. As the Clinton campaign continues to remind you, Obama is not the nominee, but this is a question we will address when he is.”

According to the *New York Times* (February 15, 2008), “‘We will address that issue in the general election, when we’re the nominee,’ Mr. Burton said. ‘We’re just not entertaining hypotheticals right now.’”

These statements by Mr. Burton conflict with the commitment you made last year. There was nothing said in your commitment about public financing in the general election being an “option,” or “a question we will address” at such time as you are the nominee.

Last year, on March 1, 2007, following a favorable FEC response to your advisory opinion request, Mr. Burton, stated: “If Senator Obama is the nominee, he will aggressively pursue an agreement with the Republican nominee to preserve a publicly financed general election,” according to the *Associated Press*.

On the same day, Senator McCain’s campaign issued a statement making the same kind of commitment. The statement said, “Should John McCain win the Republican

nomination, we will agree to accept public financing in the general election, if the Democratic nominee agrees to do the same.”

Some nine months later you repeated the commitment in response to a questionnaire.

On November 27, 2007, the Midwest Democracy Network, an alliance of 20 civic and public interest groups based in Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin, released the results of a questionnaire that they sent to all of the presidential candidates.

The following question was on the questionnaire:

If you are nominated for President in 2008 and your major opponents agree to forgo private funding in the general election campaign, will you participate in presidential public financing system?

You answered this question as follows:

**OBAMA:** Yes. I have been a long-time advocate for public financing of campaigns combined with free television and radio time as a way to reduce the influence of moneyed special interests. I introduced public financing legislation in the Illinois State Senate, and am the only 2008 candidate to have sponsored Senator Russ Feingold’s (D-WI) bill to reform the presidential public financing system. In February 2007, I proposed a novel way to preserve the strength of the public financing system in the 2008 election. My plan requires both major party candidates to agree on a fundraising truce, return excess money from donors, and stay within the public financing system for the general election. My proposal followed announcements by some presidential candidates that they would forgo public financing so they could raise unlimited funds in the general election. The Federal Election Commission ruled the proposal legal, and Senator John McCain (R-AZ) has already pledged to accept this fundraising pledge. If I am the Democratic nominee, I will aggressively pursue an agreement with the Republican nominee to preserve a publicly financed general election.

This commitment was made without any conditions and clearly stated, “If I am the Democratic nominee, I will aggressively pursue an agreement with the Republican nominee to preserve a publicly financed general election.”

During the course of the past year, the media recognized the commitment you made.

For example, a *Washington Post* editorial on April 5, 2007 said:

One of the leading candidates in each party — Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.), whose request to the Federal Election Commission opened the door to this solution, and Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) — has already agreed to accept the public financing

and live within the general election limits if his opponent were to do the same. It's time for the other leading contenders to make clear their intentions.

Similarly, a *New York Times* editorial on April 5, 2007 said:

[W]hy shouldn't all the candidates join Senators Obama and McCain in pledging to go halfway toward sanity by embracing public finance limits in next year's general election, providing both final candidates agree?

That would at least suggest a heartbeat still exists for public financing among the money political class.

On February 13, 2008, in response to a question, Senator McCain's campaign manager reaffirmed the pledge Senator McCain made last year. According to a February 13, 2008 post by David Broder on *washingtonpost.com*:

Asked whether McCain, a longtime advocate of campaign finance reform, would accept public financing of the general election campaign, with its spending limits, Davis reiterated McCain's pledge to do so — if the Democratic candidate also complied.

Given the uncertainty created by your campaign spokesman in the last two days about the status of the commitment you made, our organizations request that you reaffirm the commitment you made last year.

Our organizations strongly urge you to personally make clear to citizens that you remain committed to using the public financing system in the presidential general election if you are the Democratic nominee and if the Republican nominee also agrees to use the public financing system in the general election.

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