

Money in Politics Study - II

This is the second in a series of three articles on money in politics.

Last month we discussed the motivations for the LWV to update its position through a new national study. This month we will discuss some options for reforming money in politics. Then next month we will briefly review the current situation in campaign finance and reporting as we prepare for our League's Jan. 16th Consensus Meeting. The LWVUS's challenging consensus questions fall into three categories:

1. appropriate goals of campaign finance regulation,
2. how far our First Amendment protections should extend in that context, and
3. methods of regulating campaign money.

We hope you will take part in these important decisions.

So what can one do right now? A series of decisions made by the U.S. Supreme Court and driven largely by First Amendment free speech considerations have weakened the procedures that regulate the spending and giving to political campaigns. However there are reform strategies which are being considered and that remain constitutional in the wake of these Court decisions. One area of opportunity is legislative approaches. The Supreme Court has upheld disclosure as a means of providing information to the electorate and avoiding corruption or the appearance of corruption in elections. For example, legislative action by Congress, state and/or local entities could require stronger disclosure laws for political spending. Other examples of possible action include:

- Tighten rules at national and state levels governing coordination in order to limit the nature of "independent" spending such as by Super PACs
- Adopt public funding for all candidates
- Prohibit members of Congress from fundraising from the interests they most directly regulate
- Improve enforcement of campaign finance laws by the Federal Election Commission (currently the FEC is functioning ineffectively)
- Adopt a Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) rule governing corporate political expenditures

For more ideas and background information see <http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/options-reforming-money-politics>

Action in Seattle. With the gridlock in Washington, actions aimed at campaign finance reform are increasingly taking place at the state and local level. One recent example is in Seattle, where voters have elected to have publicly-financed elections and to substantially limit the influence of corporate power on city hall. Their I-122 initiative, which passed by a 60% vote at the Nov. 3rd election, provides \$100 in "Democracy Vouchers" for each of Seattle's 400,000-plus registered voters, meaning that ordinary voters can counter corporate influence on elections by up to \$40 million in a given cycle. The funding for the vouchers comes from an \$8 property tax levied on homes worth \$400,000 or more. I-122 also prohibits corporations that do more than \$250,000 in annual business with the city from donating to local political campaigns. It also outright bans all donations from corporations that put more than \$5,000 a year into lobbying elected officials. Motivation for the initiative derived from a concern of disproportionate influence by large local

corporate donors and lobbyists. For example, the Seattle-based Sightline Institute found that 22 of the biggest corporate donors won \$84 million in contracts from the city of Seattle between 2013 and 2015, in return for donating just \$28,000 to candidates for municipal elections and lobbying. While the outcomes of Seattle's new election voucher and donation limits regulations remains to be seen, this initiative points to the increasing desire of voters to implement their own local solutions to the problem of big money in politics.

The SWSCV's Money in Politics Study Committee is composed of Danice and Tom Picraux (co-chairs), Eileen Barnes, Liz Gibbons, Meg Giberson, Dale Hill, Emily Lo, Cherri Nelson, Gail Pedersen, Marico Sayoc, and Patty Weber. We welcome LWV Los Altos/Mountain View who will be joining SWSCV in our Jan. 16th Consensus Meeting. To be included or learn more about the study please contact Danice and Tom Picraux at dpicraux@gmail.com or (408) 356-8129

Excellent resources and a wealth of additional information about money in politics can be found at the LWVUS web site: <http://forum.lwv.org/category/member-resources/our-work/money-politics-review>.

*Please mark your calendar and be part of this important decision
with the Southwest Santa Clara Valley League*

Money in Politics Consensus Meeting
Saturday, January 16, 1:00 – 4:00 pm,
West Valley College
Campus Center
14000 Fruitvale Ave.
Saratoga