

Americans for Campaign Finance Reform - Brennan Center for Justice - Campaign Legal Center
- Common Cause
Democracy 21- League of Women Voters - People For the American Way
Public Campaign- Public Citizen - U.S. PIRG

**Oppose Effort to Undermine Vital Role of Average Citizens and Small Donors
in Financing Presidential Elections, Vote No on H.R. 359**

January 24, 2011

Dear Representative,

Our groups strongly urge you to oppose H.R. 359, a bill to repeal the presidential public financing system. This legislation would eliminate a system which has given average citizens and small donors a critically important role to play in funding our presidential campaigns.

The presidential public financing system has served the country and presidential candidates of both parties well for most of its 35-year existence. The system only began to decline when campaign costs outstripped the public financing provided to participating candidates and frontloading changes in the presidential nominating process occurred.

The presidential public financing system needs to be repaired, not repealed, in order to continue serving the interests of the American people and protecting against corruption.

The groups opposing H.R. 359 include Americans for Campaign Reform, Brennan Center for Justice, Campaign Legal Center, Common Cause, Democracy 21, League of Women Voters, People For the American Way, Public Campaign, Public Citizen and U.S. PIRG.

On January 5, 2011 newly elected Speaker John Boehner promised the American people “a fair, open process” in Congress. We cannot see how this commitment matches up with the plan to bring H.R. 359 to the floor for a vote in the first month of a two-year Congress with no hearings on the legislation and no consideration of the legislation by the Committee of jurisdiction.

Since 1976, the presidential public financing system has been voluntarily used by most candidates from both parties.

For example, every Republican presidential nominee from 1976 to 2008 used the presidential public financing system to finance their general election campaigns. This included President Gerald Ford, President Ronald Reagan (twice), President George H.W. Bush, Senator Bob Dole, President George W. Bush (twice) and Senator John McCain.

Similarly all Democratic presidential nominees during this same period, with the exception of President Barack Obama, used the system to pay for their general election campaigns. This included President Jimmy Carter (twice), Vice President Walter Mondale, Governor Michael Dukakis, President Bill Clinton (twice), Vice President Al Gore and Senator John Kerry.

The Republican and Democratic parties have also requested and received public funds to pay for their national presidential nominating conventions for every convention from 1976 to 2008.

The *Citizens United* decision which unleashed corporate expenditures in our national elections demonstrates just how essential it is to repair the presidential public financing system. A modernized system would provide presidential candidates with a viable alternative way to finance their campaigns focused on average citizens and small donors, as opposed to being dependent on big donors, bundlers, lobbyists, and corporate and other outside spenders.

Reps. David Price (D-N.C.) and Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) introduced legislation in the last Congress (H.R. 6061), and will be re-introducing it again, that would modernize the presidential public financing system and make it an attractive and viable option again. The key goal of this legislation is to increase the role and importance of small donors in presidential campaigns and decrease the role and importance of influence-seeking money.

Public financing of presidential elections has been valuable because it has provided candidates with the monies they need to mount viable candidacies and wage competitive campaigns. In this way, public funding has not only served to promote competition in elections and provide more meaningful choices to voters, but it has also helped to ensure that more presidential candidates have the opportunity to share their views with the electorate. For many candidates, public funding was the source of sorely needed funds at crucial points in a presidential race.

President Ronald Reagan, for example, probably benefited from public financing as much as any candidate who has used the system. President Reagan participated in the presidential public financing system in all three of his presidential campaigns in 1976, 1980 and 1984.

Due to his broad base of supporters throughout the nation, President Reagan was able to capitalize on his small-donor fundraising capacity to accrue substantial sums of public money. In fact, even in 1984, when as President he was seeking reelection without significant opposition from within his own party, President Reagan raised about 60 percent of the funds for his campaign from small donors and, as a result, received \$9.7 million in primary matching funds. Most notably, this was the maximum amount of public money a primary candidate could receive in accordance with the law at the time. To date, President Reagan stands as the only candidate to ever reach the public funding primary campaign maximum.

It is essential to the health and integrity of our democracy to defeat the effort this week to kill the presidential public financing system and to move towards modernizing the system.

House members should support efforts to increase the role and importance of average citizens and small donors in our presidential elections. Representatives should not take action to turn the elections over to big donors, bundlers, lobbyists, corporate spenders and other outside spenders.

Our organizations strongly urge you to vote against H.R. 359.

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