

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

February 24, 2011

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid
Senate Majority Whip Richard Durbin
Senate Democratic Conference Vice Chairman Charles Schumer

Dear Senators Reid, Durbin and Schumer,

Our organizations strongly urge you to exercise your Senate leadership positions to take all steps necessary to defeat any effort by Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell or any other Senator to kill the presidential public financing system by attaching an amendment to the FY 11 Spending Bill.

The organizations include Americans for Campaign Reform, Brennan Center for Justice, Campaign Legal Center, Common Cause, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), Democracy 21, League of Women Voters, People For the American Way, Public Campaign, Public Citizen and U.S. PIRG.

Our organizations greatly appreciate the important national leadership you have provided in the past on behalf of campaign finance, ethics and lobbying reforms.

Your leadership is now urgently needed to defeat any effort to destroy the most important reform to come out of the Watergate scandals.

The presidential public financing system has been described by campaign finance scholar Anthony Corrado "as the flagship of public financing systems used in the United States" and as a system "designed to establish a safeguard against corruption in the political system."

As you know, House Republicans recently passed an amendment to the House FY 11 Spending Bill to end the presidential public financing system. Senator McConnell introduced legislation in the Senate earlier this year that similarly would kill the presidential system.

The presidential system needs to be repaired, not killed.

The system has served the nation and presidential candidates of both major parties well for most of its existence and has protected citizens against corruption. The system also has given average citizens and small donors a major role to play in financing our presidential campaigns.

We are facing an all-out assault on the nation's campaign finance laws that were enacted to prevent corruption of federal officeholders and government decisions, and the appearance of such corruption.

The assault began last year with the disastrous Supreme Court decision in the *Citizens United* case which, for the first time since the Robber Baron era, opened the floodgates for corporate money to directly influence federal elections and government decisions.

The next stage of the assault came in the last Congress, when Senator McConnell led a successful filibuster to stop Congress from closing loopholes in the campaign finance disclosure laws. The filibuster blocked by just one vote the enactment of the DISCLOSE Act.

As a result, we now face hundreds of millions of dollars in secret contributions being spent to influence the 2012 presidential and congressional races, unless new contribution disclosure requirements are put in place in time for the 2012 elections.

The current effort to kill the presidential public financing system is the third stage of the assault on the nation's campaign finance laws. This is not just an attack on public financing for presidential races, it is an effort to kill the whole idea of public financing as an alternative means for financing national, state and local elections.

The ongoing assault on the nation's anti-corruption campaign finance laws must be stopped and it must be stopped now in the Senate. If it is not, the consequences for citizens will be disastrous and the assault will move forward to attack other core campaign finance laws, such as limits on contributions to candidates and parties.

The presidential public financing system has been used since 1976 by every President, with the exception of President Obama, to finance their general election campaigns and by most candidates of both major parties to finance their primary campaigns.

Tens of millions of citizens have participated in the political process by using the tax check-off to direct a small amount of their taxes to fund presidential elections. Many millions of citizens have also participated by providing small contributions to presidential candidates that were magnified in importance by public matching funds.

Senator McConnell and other congressional opponents, on the other hand, would leave us with a presidential financing system that has little use for average citizens and small donors and that is dominated by influence-seeking corporate spenders, bundlers and big donors.

President Obama has recognized the importance of preserving the presidential public financing system. In a statement issued on January 25, 2011, the Obama Administration said, "The Administration strongly opposes House passage of H.R. 359 because it is critical that the Nation's Presidential election public financing system be fixed rather than dismantled."

Recent editorials in *The New York Times* (January 23, 2011), *The Washington Post* (January 25, 2011), *The Los Angeles Times* (January 25, 2011) and *USA TODAY* (February 2, 2011) also have recognized the importance of the presidential financing system in calling for the system to be repaired and in opposing efforts in Congress to eliminate it.

Polls have shown widespread public support for the presidential public financing system. For example, a *USA TODAY/Gallup* Poll (October 28, 2008) taken at the close of the 2008

presidential election found that more than 70 percent of the public supported continuing the presidential public financing system while only 20 percent said the system should be eliminated.

We are calling on Senators to take a stand for average citizens and small donors and against influence-seeking corporate spenders, bundlers and big givers by voting to preserve the presidential public financing system.

We strongly urge you to exercise your leadership positions and do all within your powers to defeat any effort to kill the presidential public financing system.

Americans for Campaign Reform
Brennan Center for Justice
Campaign Legal Center
Common Cause
CREW

Democracy 21
League of Women Voters
People For the American Way
Public Campaign
Public Citizen
U.S. PIRG