

June 19, 2012

Dear Senator:

Our organizations strongly support the legislation introduced today by Senator Mark Udall to repair the presidential public financing system. We urge you to co-sponsor the legislation and to support its enactment.

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

Companion legislation to repair the presidential financing system has also been introduced in the House by Representatives David Price (D-NC), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) and Walter Jones (R-NC) that was also supported by our groups.

This past Sunday marked the 40th anniversary of the burglary at the Watergate Hotel which ultimately unveiled the worst political and campaign finance scandals of the 20th century. The scandals revealed massive corruption associated with the financing of President Nixon's re-election campaign in 1972.

In response to the scandals, Congress enacted comprehensive campaign finance reform legislation, including the establishment of the public financing system for presidential elections. Leading campaign finance scholar Anthony Corrado would later describe the presidential financing system as "the most innovative change in federal campaign finance law in American history."

The presidential public financing system served the country and presidential candidates of both parties well for most of its existence. It empowered citizens to play a central role in the financing of presidential elections and effectively protected against the government corruption that had been at the core of the Watergate campaign finance scandals.

The viability of the presidential public financing system, however, declined in recent years as increases in the costs of running a presidential campaign greatly outstripped the public funds and spending limits provided by the system. Congress in turn never took any steps to modernize the system from the time of its enactment in 1974. In addition, the *Citizens United* decision opened the door to increased spending by outside groups to influence presidential elections.

As a result, the presidential public financing system no longer provides candidates with an alternative way to effectively finance a presidential campaign.

The legislation introduced today by Senator Udall would repair the presidential system and make it once again a viable alternative for presidential candidates. In a campaign finance system now dominated by special interest influence-money, due in good part to the disastrous *Citizens United* decision, an alternative financing system based on engaging and empowering citizens by matching their small contributions with multiple public funds is essential.

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.

President Ronald Reagan benefited more than any other candidate from the presidential public financing system by participating in the system for his three presidential campaigns, including his successful presidential races in 1980 and 1984. In 1984, as a result of the system, "President Ronald Reagan ran for reelection without holding a single campaign fundraiser," according to the *Washington Post* (June 17, 2012).

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.

2012 has seen a return of unlimited contributions, secret money and corporate funds to our elections, the same kind of money that led to the Watergate scandals. The nation needs a modernized presidential public financing system focused on average citizens and small donors to provide presidential candidates with a viable alternative to influence-seeking political money.

We strongly urge you to support and co-sponsor the legislation introduced today by Senator Udall to repair the presidential public financing system.

Americans for Campaign Reform
Brennan Center for Justice
Campaign Legal Center
Common Cause
Citizens for Responsibility
and Ethics in Washington

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