

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE WEST VIRGINIA CLEAN ELECTIONS ACT

What is the WV Clean Elections Act? The WV Clean Elections Act is a comprehensive approach to campaign finance reform that will fundamentally improve and preserve our democratic electoral process. It is modeled after laws already in place in Maine, Arizona, Vermont and Massachusetts, and establishes a voluntary alternative to the current system. Candidates qualify for public funding by agreeing to limit their spending and reject all private donations. Candidates must also demonstrate public support by collecting a certain number of signatures along with \$5 contributions from registered voters in their district.

Why do we need the WV Clean Elections Act? The skyrocketing cost of campaigns pushes candidates into a money chase. In West Virginia most of the money is coming from less than one-half of one percent of the population. Candidates spend too much time raising money and not enough time with voters. Voters are turned off and many qualified candidates are excluded by lack of funds.

Is it Constitutional? Yes. The WV Clean Elections Act is constitutional because it establishes a **voluntary** alternative to the special interest funding of political campaigns. Candidates can reject public funds and continue to finance their campaigns under the current system. This Clean Elections option is designed to give a voice to those candidates who do not have personal fortunes or access to special interest contributions.

What makes you think that candidates will opt into a Clean Elections system? There are strong incentives for candidates to choose a Clean Elections system. No elected official likes having to spend so much time raising money, year in and year out. No challenger looks forward to the task of trying to raise the huge sums of money being spent today. In fact, these obstacles discourage many good candidates from running for office. Under the Clean Elections system candidates would be able to focus on issues rather than soliciting campaign contributions and would be able to assure voters that they are beholden only to them.

How much public money can candidates get? Candidates who qualify receive a competitive amount of public money for the primary and general election. The amount is based on the median amount raised by winning candidates for that office in the last three elections (1996-2000). If a privately funded candidate spends more than the amount allocated, a Clean Elections candidate is eligible for additional funding up to 200% of the original limit.

How much will public financing cost? The cost of running the Clean

AARP (West Virginia)
Affiliated Construction
Trades Foundation
AFL-CIO (WV)
American Association of
University Women
(Charleston)
Big Creek People in
Action
Catholic Committee of
Appalachia
Coal River Mountain
Watch
Common Cause of
West Virginia
Commission on Religion in
Appalachia
Concerned Citizens
Coalition (Calhoun,
Roane and Gilmer
Counties)
Episcopal Appalachian
Ministries
Ohio Valley
Environmental Coalition
Peoples' Election Reform
Coalition-WV
Service Employees
International Union
Local 1199
Southern Appalachian
Labor School
Trout Unlimited,
Mountaineer Chapter
WV Citizen Action Group
WV Citizen Research Group
WV Council of Churches
WV Education Association
WV Environmental
Council
WV Interfaith Center for
Public Policy
WV Fair Trade Coalition
WV Rivers Coalition



**For additional infor-
mation:**

**Citizens for Clean
Elections** at (304) 522-
0246 or (304) 346-
5891, or write P.O. Box
6753, Huntington, WV
25773.

Elections system in states that have passed similar campaign reform is less than \$1 per state resident. In West Virginia about 1/10 of 1% of the state budget (\$2.8 million) should be adequate for legislative races. That's a real bargain for more voter participation and candidates who are more responsive to constituents.

- Voluntary donations to the Clean Elections Fund. (Contributors are eligible for a dollar per dollar state income tax credit for donations of up to \$500.)
- Revenue from a \$3 state tax check-off program.
- Interest generated by the Clean Elections Fund.
- Fines levied for violation of election laws.
- The general fund and other sources decided by the Legislature.

Isn't this just welfare for politicians? No. Candidates must work hard to gain hundreds of small donations and pass the public-trust test. This is more like "workfare" for politicians, than "welfare." By contrast, the current system costs West Virginia citizens millions of dollars a year in tax breaks and subsidies given to wealthy special interests (sometimes called "corporate welfare"). A Clean Elections system will actually save taxpayers money by eliminating candidates' dependence on special interest donors and putting ownership of the political process in the hands of voters.

Won't the WV Clean Elections Act enable "fringe candidates" to run for office with public money? The show of public support required to qualify for Clean Elections funds will weed out frivolous candidates. A candidate must gather a large number of small donations from registered voters in their district.

Wouldn't term limits solve the problem?

Term limits for elected officials do not address the fundamental problem of the overwhelming and corrupting influence of special interest money in our political system. Term limits will not reduce the dependency of politicians on private contributions, nor the access these contributions "buy".

Why not just lower contribution limits?

Setting contributions limits very low would make candidates spend even more time fundraising. Low contributions also give an advantage to wealthy candidates who can fund their own campaigns. Since it is impossible to effectively limit the flow of private contributions, the best route is to provide an alternative for candidates.

Will this increase my taxes? Funding an election system is a part of good government just like the cost of processing election returns, motor voter, voter education expenses, etc. There is no need to raise taxes to finance the WV Clean Elections Act. It's an investment in democracy.

Will this take money away from other needed programs, like education? No. In fact many appropriations decisions now are skewed in favor of those who have money to "invest" in campaigns. Unfair tax breaks result in less money being available for programs like education, environment and health care. If we devote a small portion of the state budget to a Clean Elections system, we will improve how the rest is spent.

Will a Clean Elections system really work?

Maine and Arizona became the first two states to implement this system in 2000 and the system won the praise of incumbents and challengers, Democrats and Republicans. Over 170 candidates opted into this system and allowed their fate to be determined by voters, not special interests.