

A Proposal For Campaign Finance Reform

Even the very wealthy John Kennedy complained about the high cost of running for elected office. To get elected our current system requires elected officials to spend more time fund-raising than governing. Media adds cost so much that it practically forces politicians to take bribes from international corporations and special interest groups. Big money interests control our politics; so we need to do something.

My solution to the problem of money overly influencing politics is to make it easier and cheaper for the voters to make **carefully-reasoned evaluations** of the candidates.

It is far easier to study and to evaluate complicated ideas when they are in print. This is why educational institutions use expensive textbooks, and publicly-traded companies are required to distribute annual written reports to their shareholders. In addition, governmental reports are distributed on paper, and to apply for a job in America it is totally normal to submit a written application or a resume. Correspondingly, my proposal for campaign finance reform is to make more use of the written word.

Voter preparation would be greatly improved if political candidates were required to register their intentions in a brief written report which the voters could study in depth. Here is how it could be arranged. Once a politician gets his name on the ballot, his next requirement should be to submit a position paper. Then the government would mail these official documents to the registered voters. By campaign-finance standards this proposal would be extremely cheap! Since no one can get elected without communicating with the electorate, it would be reasonable to require the candidates to pay for their report's reproduction and distribution. Also, translations, and audio recordings could easily be made available.

The key idea is that these position papers should become a **major focus** for candidate evaluation, so there are a few things we can request from the candidates in order to make these documents comprehensive and enlightening. The length of these papers should be limited to about three to five pages (shorter for local offices, longer for statewide or national offices which involve more issues). The short length will force the candidates to get right to the heart of their intentions. In addition, the candidates should be required to list all of the legislative issues which concern them and tell how he or she intends to deal with each issue. Also, we should request the reasons for their choice of issues and the motivation for their proposed course of action. These requirements should make the reports very insightful.

Of course, there is no objective formula to decide whether these requested requirements are met--the voters will have to decide this for themselves. However, if candidates duck any of the requirements, it would be correct for the voters to hold that against them unless they can explain it.

Just as debates have proven to be the best way to evaluate a candidate's ability to speak and think on their feet, the written reports should provide the best insight into the candidates' overall philosophy.

Since the reports would be due right after the nominations, voters will have plenty of time and help to evaluate the candidates' proposals. Accordingly, the reports should improve civic participation because any group of friends, co-workers, or organization could meet to discuss the

reports.

Another benefit is that the reports would necessarily contain positive proposals! Today, media adds are almost entirely negative.

And another benefit is that the reports should be 100% accurate--not played with by Putin!

And another significant benefit of this proposal is that it will level the playing field so that non-incumbents who generally have far fewer financial resources will have a better chance to publicize new ideas and to get elected. This improved competition should produce better elected officials who actually lead instead of merely advocating ideas that are already popular according to opinion polls.

The top spending candidate almost always wins; and many incumbents out spend their opponents by more than a hundred to one! Statistics from OpenSecrets.org:
<https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/winning-vs-spending>

If power corrupts then big money corrupts big time. International capitalism is loyal to no one.

Theodore Roosevelt constantly denounced the influence of big money on politics:

"One of the fundamental necessities in a representative government such as ours is to make certain that the men to whom the people delegate their power shall serve the people by whom they are elected, and not the special interests."

"To permit every lawless capitalist, every law-defying corporation, to take any action, no matter how iniquitous, in the effort to secure an improper profit and to build up privilege, would be ruinous to the Republic and would mark the abandonment of the effort to secure in the industrial world the spirit of democratic fair dealing."

"Artificial bodies, such as corporations...should be subject to proper governmental supervision..."

"Great corporations exist only because they are created and safeguarded by our institutions; and it is therefore our right and our duty to see that they work in harmony with these institutions."

"In every civilized society property rights must be carefully safeguarded; ordinarily, and in the great majority of cases, human rights and property rights are fundamentally and in the long run identical; but when it clearly appears that there is a real conflict between them, human rights must have the upper hand, for property belongs to man and not man to property."

"Our government, National and State, must be freed from the

sinister influence or control of special interests...Now the great special business interests too often control and corrupt the men and methods of government for their own profit. We must drive the special interests out of politics."

Today special-interest lobbyists out spend those of Roosevelt's era by a million to one.

"It is necessary that laws should be passed to prohibit the use of corporate funds directly or indirectly for political purposes; it is still more necessary that such laws should be thoroughly enforced."

"If our political institutions were perfect, they would absolutely prevent the political domination of money in any part of our affairs."

"The greatest evils in our industrial system to-day are those which rise from the abuses of aggregated wealth; and our great problem is to overcome these evils and cut out these abuses."

"A heavy progressive tax upon a very large fortune is in no way such a tax upon thrift or industry as a like would be on a small fortune."