



Legislation Text

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971733  
SUBSTITUTE 1

ALD. RICHARDS

Substitute resolution seeking introduction and passage of state legislation regarding campaign finance reform.

-ANALYSIS-

This resolution seeks introduction and passage of state legislation to replace the current method of funding legislative campaigns with a combination of voluntary contributions and public clean money financing which will give all candidates the real possibility of freeing themselves from reliance on private interest funding.

Whereas, The current system of privately financed campaigns for election to statewide and legislative offices undermines democracy in Wisconsin in the following principal ways:

1. It violates the democratic principle of "one person, one vote" and diminishes the meaning of the right to vote by allowing large contributions to have a deleterious influence on the political process;
2. It violates the free speech rights of all citizens to equal and meaningful participation in the democratic process, and especially of non-wealth voters and candidates whose voices are drowned out by those who can afford to monopolize the arena of paid political communications;
3. It undermines the First Amendment right of voters to hear all candidates' speech, as well as the core First Amendment value of open and robust debate in the political process; and

Whereas, Voter cynicism is at an all-time high, with the Governor's Blue-Ribbon Commission on Campaign Finance Reform finding 84% of Wisconsinites supporting "sweeping and fundamental" reform, and 68% of Americans in a national poll favoring replacing private special interest contributions with a clean money system; and

Whereas, The cost of campaigns is skyrocketing, with spending for legislative races quadrupling since 1980, and as much as 90% of candidate money in some state legislative campaigns coming from out-of-district; and

Whereas, The lion's share of contributions come from a tiny, wealthy circle, such as, for example, the 2/10 of 1% of the population which made 40% of the contributions in the 1996 legislative races which produced a disappointingly low 56% voter turnout; and

Whereas, Out-of-state and big money funded elections diminishes elected officials' accountability to their constituents by compelling them to be disproportionately accountable to their major contributors and to steal large amounts of time and energy from dealing with constituent concerns in order to raise funds; and

Whereas, The current process drives up the cost of election campaigns, making it difficult for qualified candidates without access to large contributors or personal fortunes to mount competitive campaigns; especially since large contributors tend to give their money to incumbents, which causes elections to be even more noncompetitive as, for example, in 1996, when 104 out of 107 incumbents won re-election to the State Legislature; and

Whereas, The current process creates a danger of actual corruption by encouraging elected officials to take money from private interests that are directly affected by governmental actions, by encouraging them to create loopholes in the law favoring big money, thus increasing costs to government and taxpayers, and by discouraging communication with citizens unable to match the money of interest groups; now, therefore be it

Resolved, By the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee, that the Intergovernmental Relations Division - Department of Administration is directed to seek introduction and passage of State legislation to replace the current method of funding legislative campaigns with a combination of voluntary contributions and public clean money financing which will give all candidates the real possibility of freeing themselves from reliance on private interest funding.

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