

Fair Elections *Now* Coalition

BRENNAN
CENTER
FOR JUSTICE

CHANGE
CONGRESS

COMMON CAUSE

Democracy
MATTERS
Change Elections Change America

PUBLIC
CAMPAIGN
CLEAN
MONEY
CLEAN
ELECTIONS

Public
Citizen

U.S. PIRG

Summary of the Fair Elections Now Act

March 2009

Under the Fair Elections Now Act, federal candidates would run for office without relying on large contributions, big money bundlers, or donations from lobbyists, and would be freed from the constant fundraising in order to focus on what people in their communities want.

Participating candidates seek support from their communities, not Washington, D.C.

- Candidates would raise a large number of small contributions from their communities in order to qualify for Fair Elections funding. Contributions are limited to \$100.
- To qualify, a candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives would have to collect 1,500 contributions from people in their state and raise a total of \$50,000.
- Since states vary widely in population, a U.S. Senate candidate would have to raise a set amount of small contributions amounting to a total of 10% of the primary Fair Elections funding. The number of qualifying contributions is equal to 2,000 plus 500 times the number of congressional districts in their state. For example:

A candidate running for U.S. Senate in Maine, which has two districts, would raise 3,000 qualifying contributions – the base of 2,000 donations plus an additional 500 for each of the two congressional districts – before receiving Fair Elections funding.

A candidate running for U.S. Senate in Ohio, with 20 districts, would require 12,000 qualifying contributions before receiving Fair Elections funding.

Qualified candidates would receive Fair Elections funding in the primary, and if they win, in their general election at a level to run a competitive campaign.

- Qualified House candidates receive \$900,000 in Fair Elections funding, split 40% for the primary and 60% for the general.
- The formula to determine the amount of Fair Elections funding for qualified Senate candidates is as follows:

Qualified candidates receive \$1.25 million plus another \$250,000 per congressional district in their state. The funding is split 33% for the primary and 67% for the general election.

Qualified candidates would be also eligible to receive additional matching Fair Elections funds if they continued to raise small donations from their home state.

- Donations of \$100 or less from in-state contributors would be matched by four dollars from the Fair Elections Fund for every dollar raised.
- The total Fair Elections Funds available is strictly limited to three times the initial allocation for the primary, and again for the general, available only to candidates who raise a significant amount of small donations from their home state.
- If a participating candidate is facing a well-financed or self-financed opponent, or is the target of an independent expenditure, they will be able to respond by utilizing this matching fund provision.

Joint fundraising committees between candidates and parties would be prohibited.

Fair Elections helps offset fundraising for and the excessive cost of media.

- Participating candidates receive a 20% reduction from the lowest broadcast rates.
- Participating Senate candidates who win their primaries are eligible to receive \$100,000 in media vouchers per congressional district in their state. House candidates receive one \$100,000 media voucher.
- Participating candidates may also exchange their media vouchers for cash with their national political party committee.

Participating candidates could set up leadership political action committees but would be limited to a \$100 contribution limit per individual per year.

The cost of Fair Elections for Senate races would be borne by a small fee on large government contractors and for House races would come from ten percent of revenues generated through the auction of unused broadcast spectrum.

- The largest recipients of federal government contracts would pay a small percentage of the contract into the Fair Elections Fund.
- If the system proves popular like similar laws at the state level, the new system could cost between \$700 and \$850 million per year.