

October 18, 2005

Dear Representative:

We, the undersigned groups, strongly urge you to reject a proposed effort in the House to kill the presidential public financing system, enacted following the Watergate scandals to protect the American people against corruption of the presidency and presidential decisions.

The groups include the Campaign Legal Center, Common Cause, Democracy 21, the League of Women Voters, Public Citizen and U.S.PIRG.

According to an article in Roll Call on October 17, 2005, legislation "scheduled to hit the House floor early next month" would eliminate the presidential public financing system. The legislation is sponsored by Representatives Randy Neugebauer (R-TX) and John Doolittle (R-CA) and represents the second effort this year in the House to gut the nation's campaign finance laws.

At a time when the American people are deeply concerned about growing issues of corruption and ethics abuses in Congress, it would be the height of irresponsibility to terminate one of the nation's most important programs to protect our democracy against corruption and the appearance of corruption.

Representatives Neugebauer and Doolittle have written to the Chairmen of the Ways and Means and Budget Committees and requested that repeal of the presidential financing system be included in the reconciliation legislation to be considered shortly in the House.

This approach, if used, would allow the House to repeal anti-corruption legislation that has been on the books for thirty years without any House hearings on the matter and without House members having any opportunity to vote up-or-down on whether the presidential financing system should continue.

Any such effort to ram through the House a repeal of the presidential financing system without hearings or an opportunity for a vote on the specific matter would be undemocratic, wrong and against the interests of the American people.

When the presidential system was enacted in the 1970s, "public funding was heralded as the most innovative change in federal campaign finance law in American history," according to campaign finance scholar Anthony Corrado. "It remains so today," Corrado has written.

The presidential public financing system has been used for thirty years by Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals, front-runners and long-shots to finance their races for the presidency. Since 1976, the presidential financing system has been used by every major party candidate in the general election, and by almost all major party candidates seeking their party's presidential nomination.

The presidential financing system has served the nation well during its thirty-year existence, protecting against corruption of government decisions and providing for competitive presidential elections.

While the presidential system currently needs to be repaired, there is absolutely no justification for killing the program. The need for repairs stems in large part from the fact that reform opponents used filibusters and parliamentary gimmicks to block Congress from acting on any campaign finance reform measures until the soft money ban was enacted in 2002. This prevented any updates and revisions being

made in the system to keep pace with changes in the party nominating process and in presidential campaigns.

Some ideological opponents of the system in the House are now trying to use the costs associated with Hurricane Katrina as cover for ending a program they have been unable to eliminate on the merits.

Representative Neugebauer has stated, "The bottom line is that we can either spend taxpayer dollars on partisan campaigns while putting the country further into debt, or we can help hurricane victims get back on their feet while not adding to future debt."

That is clearly not the basic choice facing either Congress or the American people, but a phony argument that can be applied to any government program to which a Member has ideological objections.

The reality is that the presidential system costs relatively little compared to the tens of billions of dollars in pork barrel spending, special "earmarked" projects, government giveaways and tax loopholes that Congress has adopted. The presidential system, furthermore, is funded by taxpayers voluntarily making their tax funds available to pay for the program.

The stakes for our political system and democracy are extremely high here, as shown by the important reasons for the presidential financing system:

- Reasonable spending limits for presidential primary and general elections provide the opportunity for competitive races to occur without turning the elections into a nonstop arms race for private contributions and putting presidential candidates on the special interest "auction" block;
- An effective presidential primary financing system provides the funds necessary to ensure that serious and lesser-known candidates have the resources to communicate their views and an opportunity to compete for their parties' nomination, and that it does not simply go by default to nationally-known "frontrunners;"
- An effective system for matching small contributions with public funds increases the importance and role of small donors in presidential elections and diminishes the importance of larger donors and, in particular, influence-seeking big-money.

We strongly urge you to support the nation's campaign finance laws and protect against government corruption by opposing any effort to kill the presidential public financing system.

**Campaign Legal Center
Common Cause
Democracy 21**

**League of Women Voters
Public Citizen
US PIRG**