

Posted on: Thursday, May 22, 2008

Common Cause touts election finance bill

By **Derrick DePledge**
Advertiser Government Writer

The national president of Common Cause, a public interest advocacy group, yesterday urged Gov. Linda Lingle to sign a bill creating a pilot project for public financing of Big Island County Council elections.

Bob Edgar, a United Metho-dist preacher and former Pennsylvania congressman, and other activists believe that public financing would help attract more diverse candidates and reduce the influence of private donations in political campaigns. The pilot would begin in the 2010 council elections and run through the 2012 and 2014 elections.

Lingle has not indicated her position on the bill.

Edgar, who is to meet with the governor today, appeared at a news conference at the state Capitol officially announcing the relaunch of Common Cause Hawai'i.

Edgar said the local chapter, which has been run for the past several months by a volunteer, would have paid staff and would get financial and strategic support from the national office. A local board will help guide the chapter, which has been dormant since 2001.

"We're going to work to make government work here in Hawai'i," Edgar said.

Common Cause Hawai'i has been partnering with Voter Owned Hawai'i on the public financing bill (HB661).

"Public funding is good for the democratic process. It gives more choices to candidates and to voters. It takes special interest money out of politics," said Kory Payne, a community organizer with Voter Owned Hawai'i. "And, in the long run, it saves taxpayer money because there's more accountability and access to legislators."

The state Campaign Spending Commission has countered that it would be better to gradually enhance the existing partial public financing program than to proceed with a potentially more costly effort of full public financing. Some critics also have argued that taxpayers should not be forced to help finance candidates they disagree with politically.

Reach Derrick DePledge at ddepledge@honoluluadvertiser.com.

ADVERTISEMENT

ADVERTISEMENT