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**Editorial | Our View**

# Reform can open electoral process

By [Star-Advertiser staff](#)

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The just-finished Hawaii campaign season of 2014 may not yield a political template for the future. Any generalizations one might make are muddled by the circumstances specific to this particular case.

For example: David Ige became one of the few governors to succeed while keeping expenditures under the cap required for an infusion of public-financing funds. Although that sets a good example for future candidates, he did so with the outsized push of outside political action committee (PAC) spending — and in a climate favorable to someone challenging the unpopular incumbent.

On the other end of the spending spectrum: Agribusiness corporations such as Monsanto invested piles of cash to defeat the Maui genetically modified organism (GMO) initiative, but that PAC expenditure didn't pay off. The moratorium passed, illustrating that the sight of money flooding the political system can also backfire.

The results defy any simple conclusions, other than this takeaway: While the landmark Citizens United ruling stands — as it will for the foreseeable future — it's more important than ever to require greater disclosure on campaign finance and to create viable, publicly funded avenues for new voices to enter Hawaii's political arena.

Fortunately, there are champions of "clean elections" remaining at the state Capitol, both in elected office and in advocacy groups waging the good-government fight. Common Cause Hawaii is one such group, and it is working with lawmakers to advance the cause.

State Rep. Kaniela Ing and state Sen. Les Ihara are among those who this coming session will call for a new formula to calculate how much money from the Hawaii Election Campaign Fund can support qualifying candidates. Currently, it's too low to make public financing a viable option for most candidates.

That's one change that's long overdue. The public investment is worthwhile because it enables fuller participation in the political process by candidates who otherwise would not have a voice.

Among the other strategies that should be part of the conversation in the coming session is increasing transparency about sources of the money being given to PACs. A law passed in 2013 required the top three donors to a PAC to be listed; some are making the strong case that this roster should include more like the top 10, and that reports be required on a more timely basis.

The reasoning here is that until federal reform could curb PAC spending, at least the voter should know whose hands hold the purse strings for their elected official; public knowledge can help moderate their behavior.

Ing and Ihara, as well as Common Cause Hawaii Executive Director Carmille Lim, said they are also avidly tracking efforts in other states to offset the influence of money in government. These include efforts to require large corporate campaign expenditures to get shareholder approval for investments above a certain threshold.

And Lim said Common Cause also would make another effort to promote its clean-elections "pledge," urging candidates to promise to match outside expenditures on advertising that benefit them with their own donations to charity. The concept is that outside PACs would have an interest in restraining their spending if it burdens their favored candidate personally.

Locally, congressional candidate Charles Djou challenged Mark Takai to take the pledge with him. That was a hopeful sign, although this initiative should be rolled out earlier in the election cycle.

Lim also said the Common Cause national goal is to press for Citizens United to be overturned, acknowledging that while achieving such a solution is a long-term project, that is really the only solution.

That assessment is undoubtedly correct, but in the meantime it's imperative that intermediate steps be taken to knock fundraising off the top of a politician's to-do list. Clean elections provide the pathway to better government service, and everyone should work toward that goal.