

April 7, 2004 Council Presentation
Resolution to ...
Gary Blackmer, Portland City Auditor

The election of political candidates has been transformed in the past century.

The secret ballot was introduced in the 1890s.

About the same time Civil service was introduced to take the promise of government jobs out of campaigning.

Oregon was a pioneer in 1902 with the initiative and referendum.

Oregon introduced the first voter's pamphlet in 1907. Oregon also pioneered the direct election of congressional seats that year.

In 1913 Oregon was one of the earliest states to extend the vote to women

The Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 reduced voting barriers to minority voters who had been systematically excluded.

In response to the Watergate scandal congress enacted campaign finance reform in 1974.

Oregon has also been a pioneer in mail balloting since 1996.

There is a clear pattern and intent in these actions. Voting should exert real influence, without coercion, bribery, obstacles or exclusion. These government actions were all intended to ensure that voting represents the will of our community, to hold our leaders accountable.

Accountability is my mission as the City's Auditor and Elections Officer. Sadly, elections accountability is being eroded. Despite 30 years of efforts at campaign finance reform, Portland elections have been slowly submerged in money.

In 1970 the total spending for candidates running for an open Council seat was \$400,000, measured in today's dollars. Compare that to the most recent open Council seat where spending topped \$1.2 million. Spending in the hotly contested Mayoral race in 1972

was \$680,000, compared to the \$2.2 million spent in the 1992 race.

This trend should not be a surprise: spending large amounts of money is a proven means of getting elected. The highest spending candidate got the most votes in 97 of 108 elections since 1970. But when money is the basis for selecting our leaders then each vote becomes a commodity, and the most important skill of a candidate becomes fundraising.

Free speech rights hamper our ability to regulate campaign fundraising and spending. In Oregon, we have good laws on disclosure, but no limits on spending. As a result, we can only address campaign spending with a voluntary system.

Many jurisdictions have changed the landscape of elections with the voluntary system of Clean Money campaign financing. Several states and local governments have Clean Money systems. In these systems, the candidates who agree to limit spending are eligible for a fixed amount of campaign cash.

Here are some key characteristics of a Clean Money Campaign system.

Candidates must show popular support to qualify for Clean Money Campaigns.

Jurisdictions around the country use a variety of thresholds to qualify the serious candidate, such as requiring a large number of small contributions.

Candidates must agree to spending limits

To be eligible for the Clean Money Campaign the candidates must agree not to raise private contributions or spend in excess of limits.

Adequate funding for Clean Money Campaigns

Spending at current levels is not necessary for a successful campaign, but attracting sound candidates will require sufficient funds to run an adequate campaign.

Additional funds for high-spending opponents

Candidates who run against an opponent who does not participate in the Clean Money Campaign will receive extra funds when opponent spending exceeds the limits of the Clean Money Campaign.

Electronic Filing and disclosure

To ensure greater accountability for campaign contributions, more frequent on-line reporting is necessary. The Secretary of State's Office is moving in this direction and we are monitoring their efforts.

Twelve local jurisdictions have some form of public campaign financing, with seven of them enacted since 1998. Tucson Arizona has the longest-running program in the country and we have been researching their approach as well as others throughout the country.

Commissioner Sten and I want to work to fit these ideas into the context of Oregon and Portland elections. We all take pride in Oregon as an elections pioneer, and Portland can improve upon the state elections framework. I would be proud to help build a campaign system that keeps the voter first and foremost. I urge you to approve this resolution so we can expand the research and discussion.

Page PAGE 3