

Title:

Real Campaign Finance Reform

Word Count:

1041

Summary:

It's morally wrong for elected officials to accept money or gifts. Period. It's in violation of their moral responsibility to represent people equally, not based on how much money they have. It gives those with money a more valuable opinion than those without. All elections should be 100% publicly funded.

Keywords:

campaign finance reform election

Article Body:

In the US we should be pretty aware that the outcome of our elections are largely influenced by how much money each candidate can raise. Whoever can raise the most money has the most chance of swaying the uninformed 'swing' voter, or hiring the best advisor that can dice the polls to figure out which issues will give them the slight majority. Politics becomes about raising money.

Every time I heard desperate pleas for money from politicians I wonder, what do you need my money for? To buy back public airwaves from the people we licensed them to? To pay even higher priced consultants to slice and dice the polls? I thought I voted with my vote, not my dollars. What about those that don't have dollars? Seems to me they have much less of a vote in this democracy. Hell, if you have enough money you can just fund your own campaign, al. la. Ross Perot. Not exactly equal opportunity.

== It's morally wrong for politicians to accept money from people. Period. ==

I feel it is morally wrong for elected officials to accept money that isn't their salary. When an elected official accepts money from someone, any human is going to feel obliged to treat this person differently than the person that has contributed nothing. It's common courtesy. But this is in conflict with their responsibility to represent all of their electorate equally, not based on how much money they have. In fact, since everyone else does it, all elected officials are effectively required to to accept gifts to compete.

I know the current reality of our election campaign system is mired in a much

different arrangement, but still my "naive, absent of reality" opinion is that money should not be a factor in our elections, and it's the responsibility of the government we've created to ensure that happens. Elections are the one thing we can all agree is the responsibility of our self-government, the one thing that makes the rest of our democracy work. But the reality in the US today is that even though we all have a 'vote', those with money can use that money to make their 'vote' much more valuable than those without any money. The McCain/Feingold reforms[1] may make this even worse, as now campaigns need these extra "vote with your dollars" votes even more. We need to fix that.

== How do we fix it? ==

I would start by making it illegal for elected officials or those running for elected office to accept gifts or money from any private, corporate, religious or non-profit entity. All election campaigns should be 100% publicly funded. Arguments about the cost of that are silly. If we can all agree that elections are a primary responsibility of government, then we can agree that this responsibility can require commensurate funds.

Second, instead of charging station owners for a license to broadcast on our airwaves, then them charging us back to them for the right to conduct the people's business on those airwaves, let's just not give it to them in the first place. The license comes with the burden of broadcasting election commercials. Decrease the license fee if you need to. I'm fine with our government bearing the financial brunt of that burden, whatever it may be. The 2004 Presidential and Senatorial campaigns spent about \$4 billion dollars[2]. Considering we pay about \$300 billion[3] per year to service our nation debt (incurred almost solely by Regan/Bush I/Bush II[4]), I wouldn't have any issues if the cost to do this ran into the \$10-20 billion/year range. It should be one of our government's main roles to equalize the situation, to remove money from the equation as much as possible.

Third, I would pay these elected officials a lot more. If senators made \$5 million a year, they would have a harder time being swayed by the \$250,000 yacht some lobbyist could give their nephew. If we're going to do this we should make their salaries on the same level as corporate leaders of similar stature. Perhaps we should even tie their salaries to the average of corporate leader's salaries; it could serve as incentive to make sure businesses prosper. But we should pay them enough that other people's money won't sway them. Again, paying our elected officials is one of the few things we can all agree our government should be responsible for, the comparatively miniscule amount of money required to pay them well shouldn't be a factor.

== But if you don't give money ...? ==

A question I'm not sure about, how to you qualify to have your campaign funded? I think it should be as open and available to anyone that wants to run as possible. But it shouldn't be too easy either. Being a public official requires work, so work should be required to become one. I just would like that work to be something other than raising money. Being good at getting people to part with their money doesn't necessarily mean they'll be a good elected representative.

Currently we show support by giving money. If you can't give money to candidates to express support, how do we ensure that the people running, and spending public money on those campaigns, aren't running a boondoggle and actually have or could get some support among the electorate? (Even if a big chunk the money we spent on publicly funded election campaigns was wasted on boondoggles, we'd still have a better system that we have today, imo. The machinery of democracy is a better place than most to throw some cash around.)

Perhaps a solution would be to provide the option of altering the distribution of campaign contributions derived your own taxes? If you didn't alter it, as most people would do, your tax contributions allotted for campaigns would be split evenly among all the campaigns. If you really cared about a campaign, you could direct some of your already allocated tax dollars specifically to that campaign.

Also, what about the rich using their own money to outspend competitors? Do we ban people from spending their own money on their campaigns as well?