

Public gets interested in public financing

Written by News Desk

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By Art Parker, Editor

It was just a couple of months ago in this column that I discussed using public financing for campaigns, or limiting the sources of contributions to one's district. I received some interesting feedback on that one and was a little surprised to hear so many "pro-public" financing comments. It was even more interesting, and encouraging, to see a recent Gallup Poll released last week that pretty much said what many of our readers did.

According to Gallup, about half of all Americans said they would support a law that provides government funding for federal campaigns, effectively banning contributions from individuals and groups. About 44 percent of those surveyed were opposed to the idea. Gallup stated that Americans were consistently dissatisfied with the way campaigns are financed, and I agree with Gallup.

The poll indicated clear support of limiting contributions and expenditures for Congressional campaigns; almost 80% of those surveyed said they would support such limits. I not only find that very encouraging but also view it as a statement demanding that legislation be passed to establish and enforce such limits.

I believe the interest in public financing is not because it is a new idea but it is an extension of the mindset Americans have of their politicians. We just don't trust them. Period. And I am the first in line to say we should never trust them. In fact I believe that it is the sworn duty of every American to distrust those we elect...it makes for better government.

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Controlling campaign money, where all candidates are required to engage in a fair fight, is one way we can place them under closer scrutiny. The origin of this, I am convinced, is the never ending failure of those elected to impose term limits upon themselves. Ever since I've either watched the nightly news on a regular basis or read a newspaper every day I can recall the issue of term limits, and I started reading a newspaper long before I could drive a car. Those elected have never, on either the state or federal level, done a thing about term limits. I'm sure many people think that if we can't get them to police themselves then we will find another way to do it. The public having control of campaign financing is a big step toward policing those they have elected.

Public financing goes a long way in accomplishing the other objective of eliminating special interest money. If all of the money comes from the public then a major step has been taken to eliminate favors to special interest for campaign aid.

Public financing will also minimize the influence of the political parties during the election process. To me this is the top benefit of public financing. The parties are the greatest enemy of the people. They want their office holders to be subservient to the party, not the people. Alabama is a great example of why we need a system change. In the last several months many news reports have indicated that either Speaker of the House Mike Hubbard or former Governor Bob Riley, or both, have control of PACs with substantial funds that are committed not just to Republicans, but to those already in office. There is nothing illegal about this, but the intent is frightening.

I am convinced that the real purpose behind the Hubbard/Riley PACS is to protect incumbents by helping to "finance" their campaigns, hence making them subservient to those doling out the money, while blocking others, even good republicans, from holding office. The political bosses dole out the cash, after raising it, and buy themselves representatives and senators and they, the bosses, stay in power. Any political party that has been able to do this has done so...I'm not just picking on republicans; they are just as sorry as all the other parties. With public financing of campaigns there is a good chance we can eliminate or reduce the "party problem" as well. Hopefully, the acceptance of the idea of public campaign financing will continue to grow, or perhaps we will find other ways to improve campaign financing.