



SPEAKING TRUTH TO POLITICS



RELIGIOUS CONVICTION AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM IS NOT JUST A POLITICAL ISSUE, BUT A MORAL—AND THUS RELIGIOUS—MATTER.

Current campaign financing is what our religious communities traditionally have called sin—indeed a social sin that taints, in various degrees, all who participate in the system. The self-centered tendency to defy God's universal covenant of justice by grasping more than our due—as individuals and institutions—and thereby depriving others of their due, is fundamentally wrong. This violation of elemental justice is precisely the intent and the effect of present patterns of financing elections.

—James. A. Nash, *The Churches Center for Theology and Public Policy*

WHAT A WASTE!

The 1996 elections for Congress and the President were the most expensive in American history. Together, the candidates and political parties spent more than \$2.2 billion. That's \$2.2 billion that could have been spend on education, the environment, or health care. **It is a question of priorities.**

WHY THE CURRENT SYSTEM IS PART OF THE PROBLEM

Many—if not all—religious traditions believe that government has a responsibility to promote justice and work for the common good. Unfortunately, the present campaign financing system encourages candidates to auction off their values and votes to the highest bidders. While corporations, wealthy individuals, and special interest PACs compete for influence, most Americans aren't even bidding. **Over 80% of Americans do not contribute to campaigns.** Thus it comes as no surprise that justice and promoting the common good fail to make the policy agendas of many elected officials.

CONSIDER THE LINKS BETWEEN CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS AND GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS:

ECONOMIC JUSTICE • SOCIAL SERVICES • HUMAN WELFARE

MONEY: In the 1998 elections, organized business interests gave a combined \$653 million to federal candidates and the national parties. Organized labor gave \$58 million—a ratio of 11 to 1.

COINCIDENCE? In 1998, 34.5 million people in the United States—12.7% of the population—were poor. A single-earner working full time on the current minimum wage (\$5.15 per hour) only earns \$10,712 per year—*more than \$3,000 below* the \$13,880 poverty line for a family of three. Yet Congress still has problems raising the minimum wage!

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

MONEY: In the 1995-6 election cycle, individuals and PACs representing the natural resources industries (such as oil and gas) outspent environmental interests by an estimated 27-1 margin in Congressional races?

COINCIDENCE? The timber industry's Washington lobby, the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA), and its corporate members have given more than \$8 million in political contributions since 1991. During the same time, AF&PA member companies have received **more than \$100 million** in discounts on timber felled in national forests!

FINANCE, INSURANCE & REAL ESTATE

MONEY: This sector contributes the most: \$154.4 in the 1997-1998 election cycle. It includes banks, insurance companies, securities & investment firms, the real estate industry, accountants, and a variety of other financial interests.

COINCIDENCE? About 90% of stock shares, bonds, trusts, and business equity, and about 80% of the non-home real estate in this country, are owned by the top 10% of American families. The bottom 90% of families, on the other hand, are responsible for 70% of the indebtedness of American households. So who benefits most from the \$154.4 million this sector spends on lobbying? **The super wealthy!**

In case after case, what is in the common good loses to narrow, private economic interests. These are but a few of the countless examples. Big tobacco is another. **Is it any coincidence that these interests are the same ones elected officials must court for campaign donations?**

WHAT FAITH TRADITION SUPPORTS BRIBERY?

The problem of bribery is an ancient one that is dealt with often in Biblical and other scriptures. The prophet Amos thundered against those merchants in Israel who "sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes... and push the afflicted out of the way..." (Amos 2:6-7 NRSV). Psalm 15 defines upright persons as those who "...stand by their oath even to their hurt... **and do not take a bribe against the innocent.**"

Clearly, bribery violates enough democratic, ethical, and religious principles to give almost any person grounds for denouncing it. It should also help give people—and especially people of faith—more than enough reason to eradicate the bribery that is destroying our democracy. **The need is urgent, because the failing of our democracy has human consequences.** As evidence, one need only look at the how many people in this country are not having their basic human needs met by our government and its programs—like the 34.5 million people who live in poverty!

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES ARE TAKING THE LEAD ON CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

People of faith are—and should be—leading the struggle to put the good back in government. First, because most religious groups do not limit their attention to a single issue, it is easier to recognize the similarities of the various struggles. Campaign finance reform is often called "**The reform that makes all other reforms possible**" because of how it can eliminate the "common enemy" of so many justice movements.

VICTORIES: REFORM MEASURES HAVE ALREADY PASSED IN 4 STATES

Arizona, Maine, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire have all passed popular initiatives to reform their respective systems and provide public financing for elections. **Campaigns to enact similar measures are active in 38 other states.** Although these reforms apply only to state elections, they are key steps on the road to comprehensive federal overhaul.

ENTER: YOU AND YOUR RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY.

While there is no limit to how much you can do, there are also simple ways to make a difference. People of faith have been instrumental in passing the state initiatives mentioned above, and form the backbone of those involved in the 38 continuing campaigns. Some people of faith concentrate on federal reform, writing letters to editors and Members of Congress in support of incremental reform bills like Shays-Meehan and McCain-Feingold. Others focus on raising awareness within their own religious community. A successful campaign finance reform movement requires action in all of these arenas.

The stakes are high—democracy and the common good hang in the balance. With your help, people of faith can tip the scales towards equality and justice. **If someone has to own politicians, it might as well be us.**

RELIGIOUS GROUPS ENDORSING THIS STATEMENT:

- UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONS

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: