

**Americans for Campaign Reform - Brennan Center for Justice
Campaign Legal Center - Common Cause - Democracy 21
League of Women Voters - People For the American Way
Public Campaign - Public Citizen - U.S. PIRG**

**Oppose Undermining Average Citizens and Small Donors
and Turning Presidency Over to Big Givers, Bundlers and
Corporate and Other Campaign Spenders**

Vote No on S.194

February 7, 2011

Dear Senator,

Our organizations strongly urge you to oppose S.194, legislation introduced by Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell to repeal the presidential public financing system.

The presidential public financing system needs to be repaired, not repealed.

The organizations include Americans for Campaign Reform, Brennan Center for Justice, Campaign Legal Center, Common Cause, Democracy 21, League of Women Voters, People For the American Way, Public Campaign, Public Citizen and U.S. PIRG.

The presidential public financing system has served the nation and presidential candidates of both major parties well for most of its 36-year existence.

The system has provided presidential candidates with the funds needed to mount viable candidacies and wage competitive campaigns, has provided more meaningful choices to voters and has helped to ensure that more candidates have the opportunity to share their views with the electorate. For many candidates, public funding has been the source of sorely needed funds at crucial points in their presidential races.

The presidential system has protected against government corruption and has given average citizens and small donors a vital role to play in our presidential elections.

Senator McConnell's legislation to kill the presidential financing system would turn the presidency over to influence-seeking big givers, bundlers and corporate and other campaign spenders, at the great expense of the American people.

The presidential system became outmoded in recent years when the costs of campaigns outstripped the public funds being provided to participating candidates and when the frontloading of primary elections got out of hand in the presidential nominating process. Congress has made no adjustments in the presidential public financing system since it was first enacted in 1974.

The presidential financing system needs to be repaired and updated to again serve as a viable alternative system for presidential candidates to use in financing their campaigns.

Presidential candidates have long recognized the value and importance of the presidential public financing system. Since 1976, the system has been voluntarily used by most candidates from both major parties.

For example, every Republican presidential nominee from 1976 to 2008 used the presidential public financing system to finance their general election campaigns. This included President Gerald Ford, President Ronald Reagan (twice), President George H.W. Bush, Senator Bob Dole, President George W. Bush (twice) and Senator John McCain.

Similarly all Democratic presidential nominees during this same period, with the exception of President Barack Obama, used the system to pay for their general election campaigns. This included President Jimmy Carter (twice), Vice President Walter Mondale, Governor Michael Dukakis, President Bill Clinton (twice), Vice President Al Gore and Senator John Kerry.

President Ronald Reagan benefited from public financing as much as any candidate who has used the system, participating in the presidential public financing system for three of his presidential campaigns in 1976, 1980 and 1984.

The Republican and Democratic parties also have requested and received public funds from the system to pay for every presidential nominating convention from 1976 to 2008.

Recent editorials in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times* and *USA TODAY* also have recognized the importance of the presidential financing system in calling for the system to be repaired and in opposing efforts to eliminate it.

President Obama recognized the importance of continuing the presidential financing system in calling for the system to be fixed and strongly opposing the effort in Congress to repeal the system. In a statement issued on January 25, 2011, the Obama Administration said:

The Administration strongly opposes House passage of H.R. 359 because it is critical that the Nation's Presidential election public financing system be fixed rather than dismantled.

.....

After a year in which the *Citizens United* decision rolled back a century of law to allow corporate interests to spend vast sums in the Nation's elections and to do so without disclosing the true interests behind them, this is not the time to further empower the special interests or to obstruct the work of reform.

Most importantly, the American people have recognized the importance of the presidential financing system as shown by a national poll taken at the end of the 2008 presidential campaign about the system. According to *USA TODAY* (October, 29, 2008):

"A *USA TODAY/Gallup* Poll taken Tuesday [October 28, 2008] finds wide support for public financing of presidential campaigns, including a third who say the current voluntary

system should be mandatory." According to the poll, "Four in 10 Americans say the nation should maintain the voluntary system, and 32% say candidates should be required to participate. Only 1 in 5 say the system should be eliminated."

The *USA TODAY/Gallup* poll showed that more than 70 percent of the public supported continuing the presidential public financing system and only 20 percent said the system should be eliminated.

The *Citizens United* decision last year demonstrated just how essential it is to repair the presidential public financing system. An updated system would provide presidential candidates with a viable alternative way to finance competitive campaigns, without relying on influence-seeking money. It would give average citizens and small donors a pivotal role to play in presidential elections, instead of presidential candidates being dependent on big donors, bundlers and corporate and other campaign spenders.

Legislation is expected to be re-introduced in the Senate shortly to modernize the presidential system. The key goal of this legislation is to greatly increase the role and importance of average citizens and small donors in presidential campaigns and to greatly decrease the role and importance of influence-seeking money.

It is essential to the health and integrity of our democracy to defeat Senator McConnell's legislation to kill the presidential public financing system.

Our organizations strongly urge you to vote against S.194.

Americans for Campaign Reform
 Brennan Center for Justice
 Campaign Legal Center
 Common Cause
 Democracy 21

League of Women Voters
 People For the American Way
 Public Campaign
 Public Citizen
 U.S PIRG