

# Oregon's Political Accountability Act

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*"The Oregon Political Accountability Act will do more than make politicians responsible to voters. By reducing the influence of money in politics, it will open up the field to new people and new ideas. It will bring life to the democratic process again."*

— *Paula Krane, President*  
*The League of Women*  
*Voters of Oregon*

**M**artha Coronado, statewide coordinator for CAUSA, a grassroots immigrants rights coalition, describes the impact of the current campaign finance system: "Those who are not economically stable are hit hardest by money in politics. This system works just for the rich, not for the people who live, work and give in our communities."

While progressives have long recognized that the influence of money in politics is a barrier to full participation in the democratic system, most reform efforts have run afoul of free speech protections. Recently a new, constitutionally sound strategy has begun to take hold. The answer to the corrupting influence of private funds is the introduction of public funds.

Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts and Arizona have adopted public financing of legislative and statewide elections. In Maine, 121 candidates are campaigning under this new system. Organizers in over 35 states, including Oregon and Idaho, are currently working to win public financing of elections. As more states adopt this reform, the tide will begin to turn toward campaign finance reform on the federal level.

Oregon voters have already signaled their interest in reform. In 1994, Oregon voters passed a ballot measure that created \$100 contribution limits. The 1996 elections were conducted under this limitation, which reduced large direct contributions to candidates. However, a dramatic increase in independent expenditure campaigns and other loopholes underscored the need for further reform. In February, 1997, the

Oregon Supreme Court struck down key provisions of the spending limit law as a violation of free speech.

Seeking solutions that would pass constitutional muster, the Oregon Working Group for Campaign Finance Reform spent two years conducting research and outreach to develop workable, effective, and constitutional campaign finance reform strategies. Legislative allies introduced legislation in the 1999 session based on this policy package. No committee hearings were held on either the Senate or House versions of the bills. This inaction led organizers to file the Political Accountability Initiative.

## Building a Movement

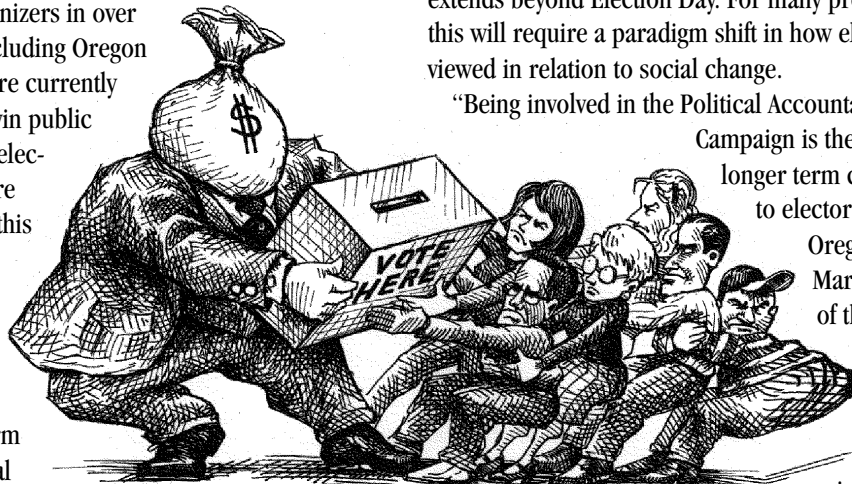
While the Political Accountability Act, if approved by voters this November, will be a strong step toward reining in the influence of money in state elections, the struggle goes beyond one initiative victory.

The difference between building a movement and winning an initiative is the organizing that precedes and extends beyond Election Day. For many progressives, this will require a paradigm shift in how elections are viewed in relation to social change.

"Being involved in the Political Accountability Campaign is the start of a longer term commitment to electoral politics in Oregon", says Marcy Westerling of the Rural Organizing Project. "This initiative is just another tool in the movement toward democracy.

Organizations must begin to think about how we will utilize this tool. The Political Accountability Act means little for progressives if we are not starting now to find folks to run for office and committing resources to educate and support them in being effective representatives of our communities."

Already, grassroots strategies are converging in



Matt Weurker

Oregon. Organizers are using the recent report issued by Oregon Action (see page 11) and ongoing research by the Money in Politics Research Action Project to educate people about the impact of money in Oregon politics and the need for campaign finance reform. Western States Center's Modern Civil Rights Struggle conference (see page 18) focused attention on campaign finance as an historic voting rights issue. The

list of organizations and individuals committed to organizing for this fundamental change is growing each day.

Our success will be measured both by winning the Political Accountability Initiative and by being ready to take advantage of the opening it will create to reclaim our political system — of the people, by the people, and for the people.



## OPAC

Oregon Political Accountability Campaign

### HOW THE POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT WORKS

The Oregon Political Accountability Campaign is leading the ballot measure fight for campaign finance reform in Oregon. Here's how the Political Accountability Act works:

#### PARTICIPATION

To take part in Political Accountability Reform, candidates must:

- Abide by the spending limit for the race.
- Accept no private contributions in the primary or general elections.

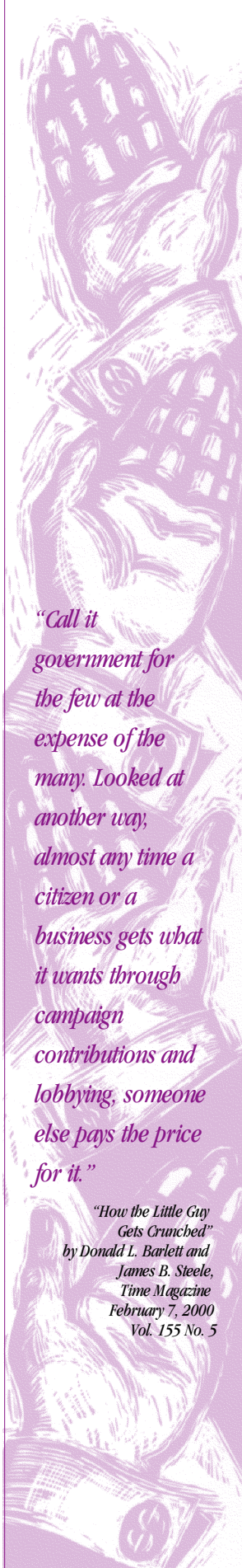
#### QUALIFICATION

Political Accountability candidates demonstrate broad public support by collecting a set number of small (\$5) qualifying contributions. Candidates can raise a limited amount of seed money (no more than \$100/contributor) to help obtain the qualifying contributions. The need for many qualifying contributions forces candidates to talk with voters rather than high dollar contributors during their "deciding to run" phase. Community support and leadership, rather than access to major contributors, determines who can run for office.

#### CAMPAIGN FUNDS

Candidates who qualify and abide by all spending and contribution limits receive a set amount of money for their primary and general election campaigns. A limited amount of matching funds is made available if a publicly funded candidate is outspent by an opponent who is not a publicly funded candidate. Publicly funded candidates will have time to talk with voters about important issues instead of spending time chasing big money. When a publicly funded candidate wins, the people will have elected officials who don't "owe" their votes to big money.

***Call the Oregon Political Accountability Campaign to get involved.  
(503) 796-1099 • [www.nobigmoney.com](http://www.nobigmoney.com)***



*"Call it government for the few at the expense of the many. Looked at another way, almost any time a citizen or a business gets what it wants through campaign contributions and lobbying, someone else pays the price for it."*

*"How the Little Guy Gets Crunched"  
by Donald L. Barlett and  
James B. Steele,  
Time Magazine  
February 7, 2000  
Vol. 155 No. 5*