



## The League of Women Voters of Portland

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### **Citizen Campaign Commission Second Biennial Report to the City Council and Citizens of Portland Memo to Council, April 29, 2009**

The League of Women Voters of Portland strongly supports Voter-Owned Elections, the city's established Campaign Finance Fund, and the work of the Citizen's Campaign Commission. We urge enactment of the Commission's recommended improvements to the system. They were developed after thorough analysis and discussion.

**Training:** The first four recommendations address the training and instruction provided by the auditor's office. Adding extra steps to insure participating candidates are fully informed of the rules is a prudent safeguard of public funds.

**Exploratory period:** These recommendations address the exploratory period, an element that until now has not received Commission attention. As the Campaign Finance Fund becomes more widely accepted and understood, more candidates will consider using the system. It is essential that potential candidates have easy access to early information. Otherwise, a potential candidate may inadvertently take steps that would make them ineligible to use the system. The public is better served by avoiding those missteps or at least addressing concerns at the time of the declaration of intent.

**Qualification:** Increased awareness of the system has increased the number of candidates qualifying within the current guidelines. Experience has shown that a seven-month period is lengthier than necessary to collect the needed signatures and donations. It is reasonable to shorten the qualifying period by moving the date of allowed declaration of intent; however, it is important to maintain current practice and leave January 31 the end of the qualifying period. It also is reasonable to expect a potential candidate to seek information and begin collecting signatures and donations well before the suggested deadline of January 15.

Increased public awareness and increased ease of collecting the required contributions and signatures support a 10 percent increase in required contributions and signatures for the next election cycle. The League, however, would oppose possible action in response to recommendations 15 and 16 (page 29). The program should not discriminate by placing artificial barriers to some candidates and voters should be trusted to make decisions about how often to support the same candidate with their signatures and contributions.

Two recommendations that merit further attention are 17 and 13. The data shows that most candidates were able to use no more than four times the required forms to qualify. Requiring candidates to purchase additional forms above that amount should not have an unreasonable impact on campaign strategy. Although the Internet has become much more widely used in political campaigns, it still is important to keep direct candidate interaction with voters. Therefore, use of the Internet in collecting qualifying contributions and signatures should be limited.

“To promote political responsibility through informed and active participation in government.”

**Financial:** The Campaign Finance Fund should be monitored to protect public funds and to hold non-participating candidates harmless. While the recommendations work to increase the likelihood of success with the system for the qualifying candidates, it is important that any corrections not cause harm to opposing candidates or public funds. In keeping with our “green” ethic, the rules should allow recycling of assets when practical.

**ORESTAR:** ORESTAR has been a great resource for the program, and we are pleased to see the Secretary of State cooperating with the City of Portland on its use for the Campaign Finance Fund.

**Certification:** The data on auditor office workload shows that meeting the time limit goal was not a problem. Two related items did cause difficulties in the most recent election cycle: 1) the early submission of 300 forms for verification did not distribute the workload from candidates who entered in January, in one case because of the concurrent special election, and 2) the late-entering candidates collected well in excess of the required number of qualifying signatures and contributions. Once a candidate has met the qualifying threshold, there is no need to verify additional forms.

**Complaints, violations and appeals:** The system must have a variety of enforcement tools, but it is imperative that they not be used by an opponent for political ends. All complaints should have a valid basis.

**Public engagement:** The Citizen Campaign Commission should be involved in educating the community about the Campaign Finance Fund.

**Special Elections:** Since each special election has unique circumstances, the rules need to maintain the integrity of the basic program. The primary period will be longer than a subsequent runoff, and potentially will play the greater role in informing the voters about the race and about the individual candidates. Therefore, it is appropriate to have the larger amount of funds available for the primary instead of the runoff, as is the practice in a general election. It also is appropriate to find a mechanism that allows a non-participating candidate to raise funds for the short runoff period without triggering matching funds during the primary.

Another issue that is addressed in the special elections section of this report, but might affect a regular election cycle, is campaign funding for the position of auditor. The League would like to remind you that the auditor fills an important role. Because they need to maintain their neutrality the Campaign Finance Fund is an essential option for them. In addition to holding city bureaus accountable for their performance, the office now oversees the Campaign Finance Fund, the Independent Police Review Division, Lobbying Regulation, and the Ombudsman’s office. These responsibilities and powers have the potential to attract more candidates and lead to more competitive races. The position may be less visible than the office of the commissioners, but it is elected citywide and of equal importance to the effective operation of the City.

The League urges your enthusiastic support of Voter-Owned Elections and the work of the Citizen’s Campaign Commission.

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