

**Campaign Legal Center • Common Cause • Democracy 21
League of Women Voters • Public Citizen • U.S. PIRG**

February 20, 2008

Dear Senator McCain,

Our organizations strongly urge you to act now to co-sponsor legislation to fix the presidential public financing system (S.2412), introduced in the Senate by Senators Russell Feingold (D-WI) and Susan Collins (R-ME).

Our organizations include the Campaign Legal Center, Common Cause, Democracy 21, the League of Women Voters, Public Citizen and U.S. PIRG.

The presidential public financing system was established to protect the integrity of the presidency and the interests of the American people. Every Democratic and Republican nominee for president since 1976 has used the public financing system for their general election campaign. Almost all of the presidential candidates from both major parties used the system for their primary campaigns between 1976 and 2000.

Last year, on March 8, 2007, our organizations sent a letter to you and to other presidential candidates. The letter asked you “to make a public commitment now to use the public financing system in the presidential general election if you are the Republican nominee and if the Democratic nominee also agrees to use the public financing system in the general election.”

The letter also asked you “to agree to co-sponsor the legislation to fix the presidential public financing system” pending in the Senate.

On March 27, 2007 your campaign responded to our letter as follows:

As you are aware, Sen. McCain has made a public commitment to participate in the presidential general election funding system if he is the Republican nominee and his major party opponent also agrees to participate in the system.

Consistent with his long history of leadership to reform our federal campaign finance system, one of the Senator’s priorities as President of the United States would be the enactment of legislation to improve the presidential funding system. As you know, Sen. McCain has co-sponsored legislation on this subject in the past, but has determined not to do so while he himself is a presidential candidate.

In our March 8 letter to you last year, we stated:

It is essential to the health of our democracy that we avoid having the presidency on a permanent auction block and presidential candidates engaged in a never-ending race to spend ever-growing massive amounts of private contributions.

We also noted in the letter that in upholding the public financing system's constitutionality, the Supreme Court in *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976) set forth the policy goals that led to its enactment:

Congress was legislating for the "general welfare" – to reduce the deleterious influence of large contributions on our political process, to facilitate communication by candidates with the electorate, and to free candidates from the rigors of fundraising.

Our March 8 letter stated:

The problems with the presidential funding system today are primarily the result of the failure of Congress to take action to modernize and update the system since it was enacted thirty years ago. These problems can and must be solved.

Our March 8 letter also said:

In the 2008 presidential election, for example, if the two major party nominees run their primary and general election campaigns wholly on private contributions, they are expected to spend a combined total of *\$1 billion* on their campaigns.

This, in turn, places an unyielding demand on the candidates to raise huge amounts of private contributions and to use individual "bundlers" to provide six-and-seven figure total amounts for their campaigns. The big-money donors of the Watergate-era presidential election will be big-money bundlers in the 2008 presidential election.

In November 2003, you and Senator Feingold introduced legislation to repair the presidential public financing system (S.1913). In July 2006, in the next Congress, Senator Feingold re-introduced the legislation (S.3740).

In January 2007, Senator Feingold and Senator Barack Obama (D-IL) re-introduced the legislation in the current Congress (S.436). In December 2007, the legislation was re-introduced by Senator Feingold (S.2412), joined by Senators Collins (R-ME), Obama, Richard Durbin (D-IL), Hillary Clinton (D-NY) and others.

These bills all contain the same basic approach and the two Senate bills introduced in this Congress are virtually the same.

Our organizations believe the presidential public financing system is in the Nation's best interests and that it is essential to repair the system for future elections.

As noted in your response to our March 8, 2007 letter, you have co-sponsored in the past legislation to repair the presidential public financing system.

Our organizations strongly urge you to reconsider your position not to co-sponsor such legislation while running for president and to act now to co-sponsor S.2412, the pending Senate legislation to fix the presidential public financing system for future elections.

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