

Senate urged to act on campaign finance

Bill would provide matching funds for statewide political campaigns

Globe State House Bureau

Citing revelations of campaign financing abuse outlined before the state corruption commission, a coalition of public interest groups yesterday urged the state Senate to act on the commission's proposal for partial funding of political campaigns.

The bill, filed five weeks ago by the commission and awaiting admission by the Senate, would provide matching funds for statewide and legislative political campaigns. Funds would be generated by a check-off option on state tax returns, similar to the provision on federal tax forms.

Taxpayers would not be liable for the contribution. On current state tax forms, a taxpayer may choose to contribute \$1 to public campaign financing and that amount is added to the tax bill.

The measure would also require more complete financial disclosure statements from candidates and would limit to \$250 the annual contribution an individual could make to a candidate receiving public funds. The current limit is \$1000.

The coalition, including labor, consumer and feminist groups, warned that failure to act on the

reform measure will perpetuate a system of special interest contributions to candidates in exchange for political favors.

"Testimony before the Special Commission Concerning State and County buildings, has demonstrated amply the need to change the way we elect our public officials," Barbara Feegan, president of the Massachusetts League of Women Voters, told a State House news conference.

"The legislation in question is an honest attempt to address and remedy many of the demonstrated weaknesses of the present system."

The infusion of public dollars into campaign chests will encourage broader participation in political campaigns, proponents also argued.

"This year 43 percent of the Senate and House members have uncontested elections," John Stuebing of the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group noted. "Only public financing of legislative campaigns can bring more qualified candidates into the arena of elected office." Under terms of the commission-drafted bill, only candidates facing opposition would be eligible for public finance.

Richard Cauchi, executive director of Citizens for Participation in Political Action, said the \$1000 maximum contribution per individual allowed under the current law "could equal 10 or even 20 percent of a candidate's total funds.

"By proposing to match only the first \$100 of each individual contribution, the commission bill strikes a good balance between encouraging larger numbers of smaller donations, and preserving the right of individuals who are able to give more," he said.

The measure has been admitted by the House for consideration but awaits similar action by the Senate. Once the bill is admitted to both chambers, it would be referred to the Joint Committee on Election Laws.

Fifty-six state legislators are either sponsors or cosponsors to the reform bill. Representatives of the United Auto Workers, Americans for Democratic Action, the National Organization for Women, the Assn. of Massachusetts Consumers and the American Assn. of University Women also endorsed the bill at yesterday's State House press conference.



Citizens for Participation in Political Action

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January 3, 1983

Dear Representative:

CPPAX urges you to vote in opposition to H. 6141, a bill titled "An Act Making Massachusetts Election Laws Compatible with Certain Provisions of Federal Election Laws." There are indications that this bill will come to the House floor during the final hours of the 1982 session.

Despite its innocent-sounding title, H. 6141 would allow corporations to provide financial and political assistance to any state or local candidate running in Massachusetts by authorizing the creation of corporate "PAC's." If this measure passes, corporate funds could be spent for "office space, phones, postage, salaries, utilities, supplies, legal and accounting fees, and other expenses or services incurred in establishing, and necessary and directly related to administering said political committee."

This bill is especially dangerous because it undermines one of the basic safeguards within our state election laws. Such corporate contributions are completely illegal under the current state statutes in Chapter 55. At a time when the abuses and loopholes in the federal laws regarding "corporate PAC's." are under considerable scrutiny, it would be totally inappropriate to imitate these abuses and loopholes in Massachusetts by passing H. 6141.

The existing ban on direct corporate involvement in candidate elections is a sound and workable law. Of course, every individual officer or employee of a corporation now has a constitutional right to become involved in campaigns as an individual, by contributing to candidate committees or normal PAC's up to the \$1000 annual limit. However, if corporations could use corporate funds to create a new category of PAC's, we could well see sums from \$100,000 to \$1,000,000 or more suddenly available to defeat targeted constitutional officers or state legislators. This kind of undue influence significantly harms the rights of the individual voters within a district, who would have no effective means of countering such corporate campaign efforts.

The rushed and confused last hours of a lame-duck session are not the time to act on issues such as this, which can have a profound negative impact on our electoral process for decades to come. We hope you will watch out for H. 6141, and vote to defeat this measure if it should come to the House floor.

Your help is key if we are to protect the basic integrity of elections in the Bay State. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard Cauchi".

Richard Cauchi

Political Director

The Boston Globe

ELIZABETH FAY and RICHARD CAUCHI

Reform the Legislature

Why does the leadership of the Massachusetts Legislature have such a terrible fear of democracy? The near-hysterical cries coming from their offices over a possible ballot question to reform the way the Legislature operates might lead one to believe that the forces of anarchy are anchored just outside Boston Harbor, poised for attack.

True, the initiative petition filed with the attorney general by the Coalition for Legislative Reform seeks to transfer control over committee assignments, floor leader and committee chair appointments from the sole possession of the House Speaker and Senate President to participation by the rank and file. But should vesting power in a majority of our elected representatives, rather than a minority of two, be cause for alarm?

The leadership in both chambers has accused the broad-based coalition of partisan and nonpartisan reform groups of being everything from irresponsible and naive to Republican-dominated.

The leaders neatly ignore the role of Democratic Party activists in the formation of the coalition. The commitment of these grass roots Democrats to enacting legislative rules reform was sparked when, as delegates to last April's Democratic State Issues Convention, they watched the legislative leadership pull delegates off the floor and then shut the convention down for lack of a quorum just as rules reform was about to be debated as a party plank. And so, Worcester County Citizens for Rules Reform, Cape Citizens for Legislative Reform and the Arlington Committee were formed; more such groups are expected.

Also played down by the leadership is the coalition membership of CPPAX. Hardly a "Republican pawn," this progressive group has actively campaigned for many of the Democrats currently sitting on Beacon Hill. Common Cause, another participant, has long been known as a non-partisan, issues-oriented group active in keeping the legislative process open and accountable. In addition, a look at the rollcalls will show that a number of current Democratic incumbents

have voted for rules reforms similar to the coalition's proposals.

It may be argued that Speaker McGee and President Bulger cannot be faulted for using all the power given them. Isn't that what politics is all about? The problem is in the amount of power concentrated in the hands of two people at the expense of the rest of those we have elected to represent us.

Legislators frustrated by their inability to significantly shape bills in committee stop attending committee sessions and search for more effective ways to use their time and ability. Those who are concerned about maintaining sufficient staff and office facilities to serve their constituents reasonably think twice before opposing the leadership on a controversial bill.

Naturally, those who have accumulated control over everything from the allocation of pencils and postage to the ultimate fate of legislation might view any attempt to reduce their power as an attack on the commonwealth itself.

In the 1982 lame-duck session, the Senate leadership used a fast gavel at 2 a.m. to attach to a budget measure an amendment allowing politicians to pocket unused campaign funds. Earlier in the year, the leadership stifled efforts to prohibit the attachment of non-budget items to appropriations bills. This despite the fact that a constitutional amendment, backed by over 65,000 voters' signatures, won initial approval from the required 25 percent of House and Senate members sitting in joint Constitutional Convention.

Is this respect for the institutions and framework of our state government?

The best reason for having the proposed reforms result from legislative action rather than a voter initiative is the need to restore public trust in the Massachusetts Legislature. The Legislature has had the opportunity but has failed to come up with any meaningful reforms. Left without other recourse, the citizens may democratize the Legislature in spite of itself.

Elizabeth Fay is executive director of Common Cause/Massachusetts. Richard Cauchi is political director of CPPAX.

Keverian cold to bill carry-overs

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BOSTON — Although more than 100 bills are set to die today at midnight, the Legislature is not likely to make any last-minute rules changes to allow measures to carry over into the next session, legislative leaders said yesterday.

House Speaker George Keveryian said although he supports the concept of allowing work on bills near passage to continue into a new session, he does not plan to change the current rules that require the death of all pending legislation when a session ends.

"The Speaker is not favorably disposed to changing the rules in

the last day," said Keveryian spokesman Al Frezza. "There's also a question of whether the clerks are equipped to pull that kind of thing off."

The liberal citizens group Citizens for Participation in Political Action is pushing for allowing bills close to passage to carry over into the new year.

Richard Cauchi, director of the CPPAX group, said the proposal, "solves the waste of time and taxpayer money when major bills must artificially return to the first steps despite having already been approved in one or both chambers."

CPPAX Legislative & Electoral Action

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February 22, 1988

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF STATEWIDE PUBLIC FINANCING

Citizens for Participation in Political Action (CPPAX) urges passage of House Bill 1304, "An Act amending the law providing for Limited Public Financing of Campaigns", filed by Sec. of State Michael Connolly and Rep. John Businger.

Unlike some bills filed in previous years, this bill is simple, realistic, and limited in its effect. For more than a dozen years, Massachusetts has had a system of public financing for the six constitutional offices -- Governor, Lt. Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, Treasurer and Auditor. Candidates seeking these offices receive a portion of the funds for their campaign from the "Massachusetts Election Fund." Under present law, individual taxpayers decide if they wish one dollar designated for campaign purposes, by checking a box on their annual state income tax form.

H.1304 changes only one simple provision in the existing law (Section 6C of Chapter 62 of the General Laws). Instead of the designated one dollar being "added-on" to the tax obligation of that taxpayer, the one dollar is appropriated from the state's general revenue fund. This change is needed because few voters are willing to voluntarily increase the amount they are paying out, on the very day they are writing checks to cover their income tax. The result has been a pool of money too small to impact the way these campaigns are conducted. This bill lets Massachusetts use the existing federal model, where one checks a box on the IRS 1040 form, where but that choice does not increase or decrease the individual's tax total.

The Election Laws Committee and the entire Legislature deserves credit for approving the "PAC Limit" law in 1987. Controls on special-interest campaign spending are an important element in creating an improved election process. However, H.1304 addresses the other side of the same issue. It may be the only bill in the 1988 session which encourages appropriate spending rather than restricting it. It acknowledges what Legislators already know: that the cost of running a campaign continues to increase, and that money is a central part of modern elections.

Finally, a word on what this bill does not do. It has no effect on state legislative races, on congressional races or any other local offices. It does not create any new spending limits for individuals or PACs. It does not require any new administrative procedures or even forms, since the "Fund" already exists. Based on the federal IRS "check-off" experience (only 20%-30% of Mass. taxpayers choose this option), the financial impact on the state will be very small -- under one-half million dollars per year.

1988 should be a good year to act on this bill. The presidential election means the public is more aware of elections and spending. At the same time, our statewide constitutional offices won't be on the ballot for another 2 1/2 years, so no one can say this bill will benefit a particular candidate or party. We urge your favorable action on H.1304.