

Testimony of Senator Warren B. Rudman
Co-chair, Americans for Campaign Reform
before
Senate Committee on Rules and Administration
June 20, 2007

Madame Chairwoman, members of the committee, I want to thank you for inviting me to speak to you this morning. I am here to state unequivocally that I support public funding of elections and specifically support the Fair Elections Now Act that has been introduced by Senators Durbin and Specter.

Many of you know that I have not always held this view and all of you should know that I have reached this conclusion reluctantly. Times have changed and so have I. That's why I am honored to serve as a Co-Chair of Americans for Campaign Reform, the just six dollar movement, along with former Senators Bill Bradley, Bob Kerrey, and Al Simpson.

As I look back on my twelve years in Washington, I hesitate to guess how many hours I devoted to attending fundraisers and calling strangers for campaign contributions. Today, as all of you know first hand, the problem has gotten much, much worse. In 2004, nearly four billion dollars was spent on the congressional and presidential campaigns, up from 2.2 billion dollars in 1996. The average cost to win a Senate seat in 2004 was well over seven million dollars. That means that you and your colleagues had to raise an average of four thousand six hundred dollars apiece every weekday for the six years you were in office.¹ Every hour that each of you were forced to spend dialing for dollars, calling people you don't even know, was an hour that you were not serving your country and your constituents.

I have seen how the influx of cash on our system has distorted our nation's agenda, undermined our democratic values, driven voters away from the polls and limited electoral competition.

There are two insurmountable problems inherent in our current system, one rooted in reality and the other in perception. The reality is that private financing loosens a cascade of special interest money. The perception is that many Americans, or most, lack confidence in Congress or believe our system is corrupt. While this perception is unfair to the many good people in Congress, our democracy suffers nonetheless.

Unfortunately, I believe that it will be difficult, if not impossible, for Congress to face those issues that are particularly vexing and challenging if they don't have the confidence of the American people.

Miles away from the Beltway, Arizona and Maine have implemented public funding for state races, and polls indicate growing support across the country. In Maine, eighty percent of those elected to the legislature in 2006 rejected private money, freeing them

from the endless pursuit of contributions. Five top Arizona officials were elected without taking a dime of special interest money.

Janet Napolitano, the governor of Arizona, said after her election, "I could spend my time talking with voters, not big contributors." Once in office, she said, "Lobbyists are not swarming around me."

With public financing, the power rests with voters, not special interests. When the cost of financing a campaign is not an intimidating obstacle, more of our most able leaders will likely consider public service. Once elected, they will be free to spend their time and energy attending to the nation's business instead of wasting their time on nonstop and demeaning fundraising. And when Americans have greater confidence in our democracy, more will participate and more will vote.

A healthy part of the American Dream has always been the notion that *anyone* can hold public office. Increasingly, candidates' qualifications are being measured by the size of their wallets, not the strength of their ideas. Public funding would once again allow Americans from every walk of life, and income level, to contemplate public service.

To respect the First Amendment, public funding must of course be voluntary. Yet it still works. The key is to make sufficient public money available so that an unknown candidate who qualifies will have the necessary funds to introduce themselves and their points of view to all the voters in their state.

Election history shows that candidates who opt out of public funding, and spend significantly more, will not have a meaningful advantage as long as their opponents are reasonably funded. I believe that the mechanisms included in the Fair Elections Now Act are an ideal way to ensure that those who accept public funds will have sufficient money to run competitive races.

As I became more familiar with public funding, I was truly surprised to learn how inexpensive it will be. For just six dollars a citizen per year, we can publicly fund all elections for Congress and the White House. That's a real bargain when you consider that pork barrel projects alone cost each and every American well more than one hundred dollars in a typical year.

Financing federal elections with private money has led to apathy and alienation, if not corruption and fraud. It will take a bold move by you and your colleagues to restore confidence in our political system and restore faith in our democracy.

I urge you to support the Fair Elections Now Act.

Source: ¹ Center for Responsive Politics (Based on data released by the FEC on Wednesday, August 30, 2006.)