



North Carolina Voters for Clean Elections

### **The Problem: Big Money in Politics**

A government “of, by and for the people” is the most basic promise of American democracy but over the past 30 years, the skyrocketing cost of running for office has made it far too easy for special interests with big money to manipulate election outcomes and influence public policies. When a political system is twisted to serve those who can pay the most, the ripple effect is profound. It hurts democracy on every level, with the people of North Carolina ultimately paying the price when public policies, fees, inferior services and lost tax revenues end up taking money out of our pockets.

The high cost of elections stops many qualified people from running for office and traps many who do run in an almost endless chase for campaign money. This money chase has a devastating effect of the public’s perception of elections. It gives wealthy donors too much influence, burdens taxpayers with the high cost of special interest favors, and makes citizens cynical about the value of their vote.

### **The Solution: Voter-Owned Elections**

Elected leaders should work together to take big money influence out of politics and encourage citizens from varying backgrounds to engage in all aspects of democracy. Our leaders need to require immediate disclosure of all contributions, and create new streams of clean, public money to fund campaigns so that our government represents a diverse range of voters, not just the top 1%.

Voter-Owned Elections provide a way for citizens without access to big donor networks to become elected officials. This proven alternative to our current big money system also reduces special interest influence on elections and policies.

### **North Carolina’s Judicial Public Financing Program**

From 2002 to 2013 North Carolina had a voluntary program to address the inherent conflict of judges raising large amounts of money from attorneys who appear in their courts. For 10 years the program provided a statewide voter guide and an alternative source of campaign money to candidates for the NC Supreme Court and Court of Appeals if they met certain public trust conditions. Participation was voluntary. Candidates were able to raise campaign money the old-fashioned way, from private donors, OR qualify for a competitive amount of campaign money from the NC Public Campaign Fund – IF they accepted strict fundraising limits and demonstrate broad public support by raising hundreds of qualifying donations from registered NC voters.

Despite widespread popularity with sitting judges, judicial candidates, and North Carolina citizens, the new big money-backed majority could not stop 11<sup>th</sup>-hour lobbying from key conservative money broker Art Pope to save the program from repeal.



North Carolina Voters for Clean Elections

## **Support for Campaign Finance Reform**

### **Bipartisan Support for a National Model**

A bipartisan group of NC business and civic leaders wrote state legislators to encourage their continued support of the program. The letter was signed by former Gov. Jim Holshouser, Gov. Jim Martin and Gov. Jim Hunt, a dozen former presidents of the State Bar and NC Bar Association, and hundreds of other leaders.

The American Bar Association heralded North Carolina's innovative program as a model for the nation. Its framework has now been used for judicial public financing programs in New Mexico, Wisconsin and West Virginia. A 2009 report by the Center for Government Studies says:

*"North Carolina established the nation's first effective public campaign financing program for judicial elections in 2004. . . . The program increases public confidence in the courts by eliminating [the chase for] political contributions in judicial elections."*

### **Broad Participation by Candidates**

- 55 of 69 (80%) of the candidates in contested races for the NC Supreme Court and Court of Appeals enrolled in the program in the 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012 general elections.
- 8 of the 55 candidates who enrolled in the program failed to qualify for a public grant because they did not obtain the threshold number of donors or dollar amount of qualifying contributions.
- All kinds of candidates have qualified: incumbents and challengers; black and white; men and women; Democrats and Republicans; winners and losers.

### **Overwhelmingly Supported by North Carolinians**

- Overall, 68% of NC voters support public financing of elections because it has helped women and minorities win more judicial races under the system.
- 68 % of voters say they are less likely to vote for a state legislator who supports more money in judicial elections.
- 56% of voters support the program because cutting it would give special interests more power in the courtroom.

### **Reduced Special Interest Funding & Conflicts-of-Interest**

One objective of the program was to provide judicial candidates with an alternative source of "clean" funding so they did not need to rely so heavily on those who appear in their courtrooms. The program has replaced a dependency on self-interested money with public-interest money.

- Before the program began, judicial candidates in the 2002 general election received 73% of their non-family campaign money from attorneys, special-interest PACs or political committees
- This figure dropped to 14% for the 12 candidates who qualified to receive public support in the 2004 general election and has remained low since then.