



The Hawai'i Women's Coalition

Annelle Amaral, Chair

MEDIA RELEASE

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HAWAII WOMEN STAND TO GAIN FROM "CLEAN ELECTIONS" **Maine and Arizona Election Data Show More Women Running for State Offices** **and Winning with Public Funding**

HONOLULU: APRIL 7, 2005 - What does it mean for governmental programs that affect employment, earnings, family life, education and health when only 29% of Hawai'i's Legislators are women, and only 44 percent of Hawaii's women actually vote? Woman Governor or not, Hawai'i also ranks dead last nationally in registered women voters: 51 percent, and earned a dubious C- grade for political participation from the Institute For Women's Policy Research. <<http://www.iwpr.org>> Hawai'i has slid in the national Index of Women in Elected Office from 7 (pretty good) to 20th.

"We've got to get more women into office," said Annelle Amaral, Chair of the Hawai'i Women's Coalition. "While Hawai'i is not the worst in the nation in the number of women sitting in our state legislature and county councils, I'm convinced that policies affecting paid family and medical leave, early care and education, women's access to pensions, job training, and unemployment insurance, poverty and welfare, and health care, would improve if local women started using their political clout."

Among the reasons fewer women hold fewer offices is that male candidates usually have greater access to money raising networks of business associates, and incumbents typically outspend challengers three to one. It's not an accident then that the two states showing increases in the number of women running and winning state offices provide a public funding system that allows qualified candidates to receive a competitive amount of campaign funds without being dependent on their own wealth or special interests donors. Maine has seen a 29% increase (from 68 to 86) of women running as Clean Elections candidates from 2002-2004; and 82% won their races without taking private gifts.

In Arizona the number of women winning legislative office improved from a dismal 19 out of 90 seats (21%) in 2002, to a somewhat better 30 (33%) in 2004. An all-time high. Seventeen (of 30) of these women ran on the innovative Clean Elections program. Newly elected state Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick is quick "to credit public financing as vital to her election." Not only would she have been unable to finance a nearly \$30,000 campaign herself, but the public funds meant she did not have to ask lobbyists or corporate and union PACs for money during the campaign. "This shows that Clean Elections is succeeding in one of its primary goals: opening up the political process to a greater diversity of candidates, especially women and minorities," said Barbara Lubin, Executive Director of the Arizona Clean Elections Institute. "Clean Elections funding makes it possible for ordinary Arizonans to seek public office without going deeply in debt or becoming financially obligated to wealthy special interests."

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Women who were elected or re-elected to the Arizona Legislature in November, 2004 say Clean Elections is especially important to first-time candidates. "I had no experience with lobbyists or PACs," said Representative Kirkpatrick. "Certainly contacting them and developing those relationships would have been extremely difficult in the midst of campaigning. I'm not in the position (myself) to finance a campaign, so I probably would not have run without Clean Elections."

One elected female Representative from a blue-collar district said that "my supporters aren't financially able to pay for a traditional campaign either." "Oftentimes," said Representative Burton-Cahill, "people running for office are connected to money, to power already in other aspects of the lives. And, traditionally women have fallen behind because I think we have a lot of different challenges in our lives than our male counterparts."

Another notes that Clean Elections "open up the playing field for women and minorities." First-time candidates just don't have the necessary connections to PACs and other special interest groups. "You probably would never have an opportunity [without Clean Elections] to actually win or be able to at least run a competitive race. It would just be very difficult. Not impossible, but certainly extremely difficult."

The HWC consists of private and professional groups, governmental agencies and individuals interested in legislative issues which impact the lives of women and girls in Hawaii. It is open to all parties and operates through consensus building.

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