

## What's the Issue?

The cost of running for office in the U.S has become astronomical — with more than \$4 billion spent on the 2004 Presidential & Congressional elections. Hawai'i state senators spent an average of \$56,000 — with one incumbent spending over \$241,000. House winners spent an average of \$33,000 to win office, with one candidate spending \$98,000. \$10 million+ was spent during the 2002 Hawai'i governor's race!

Expensive TV ads, political consultants, fancy color brochures, etc. drive the fast-rising need for cash among candidates and parties. And even once elected, officials are forced to continually fund-raise for their next election.

It's no secret that this tsunami of political contributions is corrupting politics. Wealthy individuals, corporations and special interest groups can easily push their agendas while what's best for we ordinary citizens is often sidelined.

The problem is the system — not individual legislators, most of whom run for office wanting to serve their communities. Good people are simply caught up in a bad system.

Despite a long history of campaign reform laws, special interests always manage to buy their way into elections. But the voters in Maine, Arizona, Connecticut, North Carolina, New Mexico and West Virginia have enacted a new and successful method that limits the influence of special-interest money on elected officials.

## The Hawai'i Election Project

is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization formed “to educate citizens, candidates and legislators about comprehensive public funding of election campaigns; collect, evaluate and analyze data about the connections between money, politics, legislation and legislative outcomes, and to make that research and analysis available to the public.”

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### Our Coalition Members Include:

Advocates for Consumer Rights  
Common Cause, Washington D.C.

Green Party of Hawai'i  
Hawai'i Independent Democrats  
Hawai'i Women's Coalition  
The Interfaith Alliance Hawai'i  
League of Women Voters

Kokua Council  
Life of the Land  
Public Campaign

Sierra Club, Hawai'i Chapter

**And we need YOU! Please join us.**



[www.voterownedhawaii.com](http://www.voterownedhawaii.com)

NEW YORK TIMES  
EDITORIAL

December 2, 2005

*Publicly financed elections that bring more citizens into the political process as candidates, donors, and organizers are vital to maintaining the health of American democracy. Over the long run, such a system will produce better choices for all.*

USA TODAY  
EDITORIAL

December 5, 2005

*While Congress wallows in the ethical swamp where money and politics meet, one more state just found a way out. Voters will pay for campaigns, which might be the bargain of the century. They'll save countless dollars doled from public coffers to the favor seekers who fund campaigns now.*

## What are Voter Owned Elections, or Publicly Financed Elections?

**V**oter Owned Elections (VOE) is a system whereby voters finance the campaigns of qualified candidates who agree to spending limits and pledge not to take private donations. VOE allows *any* qualified citizen or office-holder, regardless of personal wealth, to run a winnable campaign for public office. They no longer need to depend on private monies to fund their campaigns. The evidence is in: when taxpayers finance campaigns, state policies better reflect their needs — rather than the agendas of the special interests.

The VOE system is voluntary and constitutional. While it can apply to all elections, we plan to apply it first to State House candidates in 2008. If the program is embraced by voters (as it has been in Maine and Arizona), then other elections for statewide office would be phased in in 2010, including the Senate, Lt. Governor, and Governor.

The concept of VOE is simple: the public funds the campaigns of candidates who can first demonstrate a wide base of public support. House candidates would be required to collect 200 signatures and \$5 contributions *from registered voters living in their district*. Once qualified, candidates agree to not take any private donations, and other restrictions apply on how they spend funds. In sum, Voter Owned Elections (the 'public financing of campaigns') is a major overhaul that allows serious candidates

to have enough resources to get their message into the hands of voters, and results in office-holders being more accountable to the public — rather than private interests.

## Can Hawai`i Tax Payers Afford It?

**E**lections determine who makes and administers our laws, and therefore are an essential part of our democracy. Replacing private donations with public funds allows candidates to spend their time talking mostly with ordinary people, and reduces the role of special interests in determining what government programs get passed, or not. As the authors of *Is That a Politician in Your Pocket?* wrote: “Every day corporations and other wealthy special interests pump another \$2 million into the coffers of our elected officials in Washington and their party committees. For their money they get an estimated \$160 billion a year in tax breaks, subsidies, and other sweet deals. That's \$160 billion lifted from taxpayers pockets — or about \$1500 per taxpayer per year!”

We estimate that Hawai`i taxpayers are burdened with hundreds of millions of dollars in tax breaks and subsidies favoring special interests. The amount that a public funding system would cost is minuscule compared to government spending. The cost of publicly funding House races in 2008 would be less than \$4 million, or approximately \$3 per registered voter per year — one-half the cost of a bento!

## How You Can Help!

**W**e need your help to demonstrate to lawmakers there is broad community support for Voter Owned Elections. Some things that you can do are:

- Encourage others to become informed about our fight to pass voter owned elections, and have them sign our petitions, attend *Talk Story Parties*, and talk to their Legislators.
- Raise money to support our research and educational efforts, or make a tax-deductible donation to the Hawai`i Election Project.
- Attend your Neighborhood Board meeting and ask the Board to endorse this initiative.
- Ask local businesses, unions and organizations to support the effort.
- Host a “talk story” at your home to educate your friends, neighbors, family members and co-workers about public funding. We’ll even provide a speaker.
- Go to [www.voterownedhawaii.org](http://www.voterownedhawaii.org) and join our GetActive grassroots list so you can receive timely updates and alerts about our grassroots effort.

For more information on Voter Owned Elections, visit [www.voterownedhawaii.org](http://www.voterownedhawaii.org) or call 599-1600 on Oahu.

