



Three Myths About... *Tax-Financed Campaigns*

Arizona, Connecticut, Maine, and New York City are four prominent jurisdictions with taxpayer-funding of political campaigns for statewide and legislative office, sometimes referred to as “clean elections” programs. Here’s the reality behind three common myths often asserted about tax-financed campaign programs:

Myth #1: *Tax-financed campaigns reduce corruption.*

FALSE. The Institute for Free Speech examined information detailing corruption within Arizona, Maine, and New York City’s taxpayer-financed campaign programs. Our findings demonstrated that many participants in these programs willfully manipulated the system, exploited loopholes to receive more tax dollars, and further abused public funds, once elected.¹

Myth #2: *Tax-financed campaigns change legislative voting patterns and diminish “special interest” influence.*

FALSE. The Institute for Free Speech studied the voting patterns of legislators who served in the Connecticut General Assembly in the 2007-2008 and 2009-2010 sessions, and accepted taxpayer dollars for their 2008 re-election campaign through the Citizens’ Election Program (CEP). We concluded that the CEP failed to change the frequency with which participating legislators voted in favor of the positions of organized interest groups.²

Myth #3: *Tax-financed campaigns make elections more competitive and change the composition of legislatures.*

FALSE. There is no statistical difference in incumbent re-election rates between states with tax-financing programs and other states.³ In addition, tax-financing does not change the makeup of legislatures. Tax-financed campaign programs fail to increase the number of women elected to office,⁴ or to decrease the prevalence of legislators with backgrounds in law and business.⁵

THE VERDICT: While also failing to achieve their goals, tax-financed campaign programs waste tax dollars and make participating candidates dependent on the government for funding.

Further Reading

1 Matt Nese and Tom Swanson, “Clean Elections and Scandal: Case Studies from Maine, Arizona and New York City,” Institute for Free Speech. Available at: <http://www.ifs.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Clean-Elections-and-Scandal-August-5.pdf> (August 2013).

2 Jason Farrell, Sean Parnell, and Brett Sullivan, “Meet the New Legislature, Same as the Old Legislature: A quantitative analysis of the Connecticut Citizens’ Election Program,” Institute for Free Speech. Available at: http://www.ifs.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/2012-10-01_Issue-Review_Farrell_CEP-Report-Update.pdf (October 2012).

3 Joe Albanese, “Do Taxpayer-Funded Campaigns Increase Political Competitiveness?,” Institute for Free Speech. Available at: http://www.ifs.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017-06-05_Issue-Analysis-10_Albanese_Do-Taxpayer-Funded-Campaigns-Increase-Political-Competitiveness.pdf (June 2017).

4 Alexandra Cordell, “Do Tax-Funded Campaigns Increase the Percentage of Women in State Legislatures?,” Institute for Free Speech. Available at: http://www.ifs.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/2017-07-11_Issue-Analysis-3_Cordell_Do-Tax-Funded-Campaigns-Increase-The-Percentage-Of-Women-In-State-Legislatures.pdf (July 2017).

5 Alexandra Cordell, “Legislator Occupations – Change or Status Quo After Tax-Funded Campaigns?,” Institute for Free Speech. Available at: http://www.ifs.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/2017-06-28_Issue-Analysis-2_Cordell_Legislator-Occupations-Change-Or-Status-Quo-After-Tax-Funded-Campaigns.pdf (June 2017).



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