



Legislator Occupations – Change or Status Quo After Tax-Funded Campaigns?

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Note: The following report is an updated version of an Issue Analysis originally published by the Center for Competitive Politics in April 2008 and last updated in August 2013. This version has been edited to include data from two additional legislative sessions in Arizona and Maine.

Issue

Proponents of taxpayer-financed political campaigns, often called “clean elections” by their supporters, assert that these programs will produce more diverse legislative bodies by allowing a greater number of “non-traditional” candidates to run for and win elected office. They argue that replacing private, voluntary contributions to candidates with government grant money will “level the playing field” so that more “average citizens” can achieve public office.

For example, Arizona Advocacy Network, an organization that favors taxpayer-financed campaigns, argues that “Clean Elections make it easier for ordinary Arizonans ... to run for office and to win.”¹ Maine Citizens for Clean Elections claims these systems “provide opportunity for...people from all walks of life to run for state office.”²

If taxpayer-funded political campaigns do, in fact, reduce roadblocks for “ordinary” citizens that run for office, we would expect to see changes in legislator occupations in the two states that have operated such systems since 2000, Arizona and Maine. In particular, we would expect to see a reduction in the percentage of legislators from the “traditional” backgrounds of law and business after the implementation of taxpayer-funded campaigns.³ This research examines legisla-

tor occupations in Arizona from 1991 to 2017, and in Maine from 1990 to 2016, in an effort to determine whether taxpayer-funded political campaigns have, in fact, decreased the number of legislators in law and business and increased the number of legislators from “non-traditional” backgrounds.

Analysis

An important consideration in this research is that state legislatures vary greatly in terms of compensation and time commitment. The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) designates three primary categories for state legislatures in terms of full and part time status. NCSL places Arizona in the “hybrid” category – that is, elected officials report spending “more than two-thirds of a full-time job being legislators” for compensation that is “usually not enough to allow them to make a living without having other sources of income.”⁴ The annual salary of Arizona legislators in 2017 was \$24,000.⁵

Maine is characterized by NCSL as a state where “average lawmakers spend the equivalent of half of a full-time job doing legislative work” for pay that is “quite low and requires them to have other sources of income in order to make a

Legislator” for nearly four decades. Because Arizona and Maine have part-time legislatures, we exclude “Full-Time Legislators” and define “traditional legislator occupations” in these states as “Business” or “Attorney.” See Karl Kurtz, “Who We Elect: The Demographics of State Legislatures. National Conference of State Legislatures. Retrieved on June 27, 2017. Available at: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/who-we-elect.aspx> (December 1, 2015).

1 “Clean Elections,” Arizona Advocacy Network. Retrieved on June 27, 2017. Available at: http://www.azadvocacy.org/clean_elections.

2 “Statement of Mission and Values,” Maine Citizens for Clean Elections. Retrieved on June 27, 2017. Available at: <https://www.maineanelections.org/mission> (September 16, 2016).

3 Nationwide, the most common occupations among state legislators have been “Business,” “Attorney,” and “Full-Time

4 Brian Weberg, “Full- and Part-Time Legislatures,” National Conference of State Legislatures. Retrieved on June 27, 2017. Available at: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/full-and-part-time-legislatures.aspx> (June 14, 2017).

5 Jonathan Griffin, “2017 Legislator Compensation Information,” National Conference of State Legislatures. Retrieved on June 27, 2017. Available at: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/2017-legislator-compensation-information.aspx> (February 28, 2017).



Legislator Occupations in Arizona, 1991-2017⁸

Session/Occupation	40th (91-92)	41st (93-94)	42nd (95-96)	43rd (97-98)	44th (99-00)	45th (01-02)	46th (03-04)	47th (05-06)	48th (07-08)	49th (09-10)	50th (11-12)	51st (13-14)	52nd (15-16)	53rd (17-)
Agriculture	10%	6%	6%	6%	6%	3%	4%	4%	4%	3%	2%	2%	1%	1%
Business	33%	38%	46%	40%	39%	39%	38%	45%	46%	39%	39%	41%	35%	36%
Education	19%	19%	14%	13%	13%	14%	7%	4%	3%	6%	11%	13%	10%	12%
Government	7%	5%	5%	8%	9%	8%	10%	9%	9%	11%	10%	9%	11%	11%
Health Care	7%	9%	7%	6%	4%	6%	9%	6%	4%	6%	3%	6%	9%	4%
Homemaker	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	2%	1%
Attorney	8%	11%	11%	12%	9%	6%	9%	12%	11%	11%	10%	7%	7%	8%
Nonprofit/Volunteer	3%	4%	5%	7%	10%	11%	9%	8%	10%	9%	10%	12%	9%	12%
Skilled Labor	7%	6%	4%	4%	6%	7%	10%	9%	7%	5%	3%	2%	5%	4%
Other/Retired	1%	0%	1%	2%	2%	4%	4%	3%	5%	9%	9%	6%	12%	10%

living.”⁶ The annual salary of Maine legislators in 2017 was \$14,271 for the first regular session and \$10,158 for the second regular session.⁷

Both Maine and Arizona first implemented taxpayer-funded political campaigns in the 2000 election cycle. By examining trends in legislator occupations since 1990 (in Maine) and 1991 (in Arizona), we can determine whether these programs have had an impact on the diversity of legislator occupations.

Since the implementation of taxpayer-funded campaigns in 2000, Arizona’s Legislature has seen notable declines in the number of lawmakers employed in agriculture or education. In the years before taxpayer-financed campaigns, an average of 7% of legislators reported an agricultural occupation; under taxpayer-funded campaigns, an average of only 3% of legislators worked in agriculture, a 4% decline. In the 44th Legislature, the last elected under traditional campaign financing, agriculture accounted for 6% of legislator occupations. That fell to 3% immediately after members were elected under a system of taxpayer-funded campaigns in 2001. As of 2017, only 1% of the current Arizona Legislature has an agricultural occupation.

The decline in lawmakers with a background in education has been even more dramatic. Under traditional campaign financing, an average of 16% of Arizona legislators had occupations in education. By contrast, under a system of taxpayer-funded campaigns, legislators with jobs in education have averaged only 9% of the Legislature, a drop of 7%.

However, some occupations have seen a notable increase over time. In particular, “Other/Retired” has grown from 1% on average under traditional campaign financing to 7% on average under taxpayer-funded campaigns. Legislators with occupations in government have increased slightly as well, from an average of

7% before 2000 to an average of 10% after.

Legislators with “Nonprofit/Volunteer” occupations have also grown since 1991; however, this occurred mostly under traditional campaign financing. From 1991 to 2000, the number of lawmakers from the “Nonprofit/Volunteer” category rose each year, from 3% in 1991 to 10% in 2000. Since then, the percentage of “Nonprofit/Volunteer” occupations in the Legislature has been relatively steady with an average of 10%, fluctuating between a low point of 8% (2005-2006) and a high of 12% in the current Legislature (and in 2013-2014). This trend – a steady increase before 2000 and stability after – suggests that taxpayer-funding of campaigns likely did not contribute to the rising number of legislators with “Nonprofit/Volunteer” occupations in Arizona.

Notably, very little changed for the “traditional” legislator occupations of law and business in the years studied. The combined averages of lawyers and businesspeople constituted 49% of the Legislature before 2000, and still averages 49% afterwards. Clearly, taxpayer-funding of campaigns has not decreased the prevalence of legislators with traditional backgrounds in Arizona.

Maine has experienced remarkable stability in its legislators’ occupations in the period studied. Since the implementation of taxpayer financing, only lawmakers with backgrounds in health care, homemaking, and business have experienced average changes greater than 1%. The proportion of lawmakers with a background in health care experienced a sharp increase before the implementation of taxpayer-funded campaigns, rising

8 Data was obtained from the Arizona House of Representatives (<http://www.azleg.gov/MemberRoster/?body=H>), the Arizona Senate (<http://www.azleg.gov/MemberRoster/?body=S>), and the personal websites of legislators. Data is available upon request. Columns shaded in gray represent years in which members of the Legislature were elected using a system of voluntary campaign contributions. Columns shaded in blue represent years in which members of the Legislature were elected under a system of taxpayer-funded campaigns.

6 *Ibid.* 4.

7 *Ibid.* 5.

Session/Occupation	115th (90-92)	116th (92-94)	117th (94-96)	118th (96-98)	119th (98-00)	120th (00-02)	121st (02-04)	122nd (04-06)	123rd (06-08)	124th (08-10)	125th (10-12)	126th (12-14)	127th (14-16)	128th (16-)
Agriculture	2%	3%	-	4%	1%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	3%	2%	3%
Business	27%	28%	-	21%	20%	22%	23%	21%	22%	28%	30%	31%	30%	33%
Education	15%	14%	-	19%	19%	19%	19%	23%	22%	17%	14%	13%	11%	9%
Government	10%	7%	-	4%	3%	2%	2%	3%	6%	9%	8%	10%	4%	4%
Health Care	4%	3%	-	4%	9%	9%	9%	10%	7%	6%	5%	7%	5%	5%
Homemaker	2%	2%	-	3%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Attorney	8%	9%	-	6%	9%	9%	9%	10%	7%	10%	8%	8%	5%	5%
Nonprofit/Volunteer	4%	5%	-	3%	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	7%	8%	8%	7%	6%
Skilled Labor	11%	9%	-	9%	11%	7%	7%	8%	6%	9%	12%	11%	10%	10%
Other/Retired	17%	20%	-	27%	24%	28%	28%	24%	24%	13%	11%	10%	26%	24%

from just 4% in 1990 to 9% in 2000. After the implementation of tax-financing, the number of health care workers in the Legislature remained steady at 9% from 2000-2004, peaking at 10% from 2004-2006. However, the number of legislators with occupations in health care has declined in recent years. Currently, 5% of Maine legislators have occupations in health care, with an average increase of 2% since taxpayer-financed campaigns were implemented in 2000.

The only other average changes in Maine greater than 1% after the implementation of taxpayer-financed elections were Homemakers (-2%) and Business (+3%). The percentage of lawmakers with a background in business has increased 13% since the implementation of taxpayer-financed campaigns in 2000, with 2016 representing a high-water mark (33%) in the percentage of legislators with a job in business. Looking at the other “traditional” legislator occupation of law, we again find great stability. On average, in the years studied before the implementation of taxpayer-funded campaigns, lawyers accounted for 8% of the Maine Legislature. In the years since, that average has not changed. In Maine, as in Arizona, taxpayer-funding of campaigns has not led to a decrease in the number of legislators from “traditional” backgrounds.

Conclusion

Our analysis highlights several key findings:

- 1) In both states, “traditional legislator occupations” of law and business either increased (business in

9 Data was obtained from the Maine House of Representatives (http://legislature.maine.gov/house/dist_mem.htm), the Maine Senate (<http://legislature.maine.gov/senate/find-your-state-senator/9392>), and the personal websites of legislators. Data is available upon request. Columns shaded in gray represent years in which members of the Legislature were elected using a system of voluntary campaign contributions. Columns shaded in blue represent years in which members of the Legislature were elected under a system of taxpayer-funded campaigns. Occupational data was unavailable for the 117th (1994-1996) Legislature.

Arizona and Maine) or remained constant (law in Maine) under a system of taxpayer-funded campaigns.

- 2) In Arizona, the percentage of legislators with jobs in agriculture or education fell dramatically after taxpayer-financed campaigns were implemented.
- 3) Legislator occupation in Maine was notably stable in the years studied, both before and after the existence of taxpayer-funded campaigns, in all but three areas.
- 4) The trends in legislator occupation for Arizona and Maine do not match.

These findings each point to the same conclusion: taxpayer-financed election systems do not increase the diversity of occupations in legislatures. Nor do these programs reduce the number of legislators elected from “traditional” backgrounds.

One possible explanation for this is that, because most citizens require full-time incomes and few occupations allow the flexibility needed in order to meet the demands of elected office, a disproportionate number of state legislators come from the worlds of law and business.¹⁰

Whatever the reason, the evidence from Arizona and Maine clearly illustrates that replacing private, voluntary contributions to candidates with taxpayer money for campaigns does not diminish the dominance of individuals from law and business professions within legislatures. Consequently, policymakers should not view taxpayer-funding of campaigns as a way of increasing occupational diversity in state legislatures.

10 Beth A. Rosenson, “The Impact of Ethics Laws on Legislative Recruitment and the Occupational Composition of State Legislatures,” *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 4. Retrieved on June 27, 2017. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4148064> (December 2006), p. 623.



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