



ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3E

**TENLEYTOWN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY PARK FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS
CHEVY CHASE WAKEFIELD FORT GAINES**

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www.anc3e.org

RESOLUTION REGARDING PUBLIC FINANCING OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

WHEREAS:

1. Political candidates need money to mount effective campaigns but the need to obtain money from third parties can harm the democratic process.
2. One such harm is undue influence of wealthy contributors
3. A bill, "Fair Elections DC," is pending in the District of Columbia Council that would, respectively address this harm.
4. We support the principle behind "Fair Elections DC," which would create a public financing program for DC elections to address undue influence of wealthy contributors. We believe that Council Members should engage in further public outreach to develop such a program, however.

Harm from Undue Influence of Large Contributors

5. The importance of money to political campaigns creates an incentive for political candidates to focus their attention on wealthy donors to the relative exclusion of voters of more modest means.
6. To lessen this corrosive effect, the federal government as well as several local jurisdictions have created systems for public funding of certain campaigns.
7. The federal government maintains a public funding program for presidential candidates. If candidates agree to limit certain expenditures, and raise at least a target amount of private funds, the federal government provides matching funds up to a specified sum to candidates in primaries.
8. The federal government likewise provides up to \$20 million in funding (plus a cost of living adjustment) to presidential candidates from major parties in the general election who agree to certain restrictions, including not accepting private funds.¹
9. The federal public funding program is funded by a \$3 "checkoff" by which taxpayers can choose to allocate \$3 of their existing federal tax bill toward the program.
10. Local jurisdictions take varying approaches to public financing.
11. For instance, some states, including Arizona and Maine, have public funding programs in which candidates receive a fixed sum from the state if they meet certain criteria involving contacts with voters (such as signatures and small donations) and follow certain rules.
12. New York City has a public financing program that amplifies the impact of small private donations by matching up to \$175 of each contribution at a 6 to 1 ratio, provided candidates meet specified criteria and comply with specified rules.²

¹ See generally "Public Funding of Presidential Elections," Federal Election Commission, <http://www.fec.gov/pages/brochures/pubfund.shtml> [last accessed on 2/8/16]

13. Seattle recently created a system where residents receive “democracy vouchers” in the form of 4 \$25 coupons that may be used as campaign donations in elections for city government.³

14. A pending bill, “Fair Elections DC,” would create a public finance program similar to the New York City model, with matching of small contributions at a 5 to 1 ratio. The bill was co-introduced by Council Members Grosso, Mendelson, Cheh, Silverman, Nadeau and Allen.

15. We believe the current incentive for candidates to focus attention on wealthy potential donors to the exclusion of voters at large is strong and perverse, and we endorse in principle the creation of a public financing program to diminish that incentive.

16. Unlike the “Clean Elections Act 2015,” however, “Fair Elections DC” would require new tax revenue to fund. Although we believe the benefits of a well-designed program will exceed its costs, we suspect that many residents will – at least initially – be uncomfortable with the notion of their taxes being used to fund political campaigns, and any bill that requires new taxes deserves careful public scrutiny.

17. Furthermore, we do not have enough information yet to opine as to whether the New York model is the best model for DC.

18. Additional outreach by the proponents of campaign finance legislation in DC will pay dividends in sound public policy and in public confidence in the law that ultimately emerges.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

1. ANC 3E supports in principle the creation of a public financing program for city political campaigns. We respectfully urge the introducers of “Fair Elections DC” to conduct workshops in every ward to engage the public in exploration of the best option for implementing such a program. Such workshops should explore all models used in other jurisdictions, voluntary or quasi-voluntary funding mechanisms like the federal tax checkoff, and whether a public financing program should initially include a sunset provision and formal evaluation process. ANC 3E would be pleased to co-sponsor a workshop in Ward 3.

The resolution passed by a vote of 4-1-0 at a properly noticed meeting held on February 11, 2016, at which a quorum was present, with Commissioners Bender, Hall, McHugh, Quinn, and Wallace in attendance.

ANC 3E

by Jonathan Bender
Chairperson

² See, eg, “Small Donor Matching Funds: The NYC Election Experience,” Brennan Center for Justice, <https://www.brennancenter.org/publication/small-donor-matching-funds-nyc-election-experience> [last accessed on 2/8/16].

³ See, eg, “Seattle Could Create An Entirely New Way To Fund Elections,” Huffington Post, 10/1/15, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/honest-elections-seattle_us_560d4018e4b0af3706dfaf02 [last accessed on 2/8/16].