

House Bill 1773: Civic Dollars will transform the way New Hampshire elections are funded

Bill component sheet - January 2017

Overview

House Bill 1773 would empower voters to directly fund New Hampshire's top state elections using "Civic Dollars." While privately financed elections corrupt elected officials and lead to laws that benefit only wealthy donors and lobbyists, citizen-funded elections place power in the hands of the people.

A comprehensive system of citizen-funded elections would give voters, regardless of their means, the ability to support candidates, provided those candidates run clean campaigns without large donations. It would also remove two major barriers to running for office—(1) lack of money and(or) political connections, and (2) reluctance to seek funds from wealthy donors and special interests.

Bill Components

- Establishes a *Clean Election Fund*
- Establishes a *Clean Election Board (CEB)*
- Creates Civic Dollars. Every eligible voter would receive \$100 in "Civic Dollars" (four certificates worth \$25 each) that they could donate to candidates of their choice for state senate, executive council, and governor – provided those candidates reject large donations.
- Sets private donation limits and provides for inflation adjustment
- Provides procedures for dealing with shortfalls in the Clean Elections Fund
- Creates an electronic reporting system and searchable database for tracking contributions and expenditures of participating candidates
- Empowers the CEB to receive complaints and prosecute violations of RSA 664 and RSA 664-A, i.e., *all* campaign finance law.
- Provides an expanded, detailed definition of "coordination," ensuring that groups making independent expenditures on behalf of a candidate do not coordinate their efforts with his/her campaign.
- Mandates one debate per election (i.e., one per primary and another for general) for participating candidates.

Anticipated Effects

- **Civic Dollars:** Every eligible voter would receive \$100 "Civic Dollars" (four certificates worth \$25 each) that they could donate to candidates of their choice for state senate, executive council, and governor – provided those candidates reject large donations.
- **No large donations:** Candidates who receive Civic Dollars would contractually agree to not accept large private donations for the primary and general elections. For those candidates, individual private contributions would be capped at \$500 for governor, \$250 for executive council, and \$200 for senate.
- **This solution has bipartisan support:** Big-money politics is a problem for everyday voters of all political stripes. Regardless of their political affiliation, wealthy donors look out for their own interests, not those of everyday Granite Staters.
- **We can restore balance:** The disproportionate influence of those who can make major political contributions affects which policies are enacted, or even considered. A system dominated by big money and special interests fails to reflect the needs and concerns of everyday people. Pursuing a better "balance" implies achieving a system where all voices are more-evenly heard.
- **Pool of candidates:** We can attract candidates that have good ideas, not just wealth, access to wealth, or name recognition. It will make candidates more accountable to voters and encourage more voters to participate.
- **Price we pay:** When wealthy special interests make large political contributions and lobby the legislature, we all pay the price--usually in higher taxes--for the corruption that results. This solution will cost taxpayers much less: just \$6 per taxpayer or about \$5 million a year, less than 1% of the state budget.
- **Full transparency:** Candidates and political committees campaigning in New Hampshire would be required to regularly and publicly disclose their donors online.