



## Electoral & Campaign Reforms

### Position Statement

Adopted: 10/27/98

The Montana Association of Churches supports new laws and existing statutes that:

- Equalize access to the political process for voters and candidates regardless of economic status;
- Promote public confidence in the integrity of democratic processes;
- Contribute to fairness and equity in elections, eliminating the unfair influence of money on the results;
- Limit campaign funding sources that are currently unregulated and unreported, especially those from outside the state;
- Allow elected officials to focus on good government and ethical policies rather than year-round fundraising;
- Encourage the use of positive and fair campaigns based on public discourse on timely issues and articulating a vision for the common good; and discourage negative campaigns, incivility and personal attacks on candidates.

### Supporting Statement

2 Samuel 23:3b-4

***"One who rules over people justly,  
ruling in the fear of God,  
is like the light of morning,  
like the sun rising on a cloudless morning,  
gleaming from the rain on the grassy land."***

Active and informed citizen participation in the political and electoral process is essential to the proper functioning of government. But this participation cannot be achieved until the public is able to trust its leaders and institutions to function in a just and ethical manner. The erosion of public faith in our electoral system contributes to the cynicism that extends to government in general.

The present system of campaign financing denies many citizens the right to full and equal participation in defining and shaping the common good. Hebrew and Christian scriptures are clear that government should not take care of the needs of the rich and ignore the needs of the poor, but rather that governments are to be judged on how fair they are to their neediest and how well they take care of the poor (e.g. Psalm 72)

For a just government to work, the citizen must have confidence that his/her voice counts in the face of controlling economic interests. The present system of campaign finance contributes to undercutting that hope, causing voters to withdraw from the electoral process.

Democracy promises each citizen participation in the political process, but for that promise to be realized, people must be able to trust that elections are fair. The present system is heavily influenced and compromised by the availability of money. The prophet Amos thundered against those in Israel who *"sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals...and push the afflicted out of the way..."* (Amos 2:6-7 NRSV)

The issue of how to limit and control the influence of money upon the political process has a long history in Montana. Beginning in 1912 with passage of the Corrupt Practices Act, Montanans, through the initiative process, set out to create a healthy balance of power between money and politics from a system that was dominated by powerful monied interests. It established a number of campaign finance laws (such as prohibition of direct corporate

contributions to the campaigns of candidates for public office) still in place today. In the mid-1970's both the national scandal of Watergate and questions about campaign financing in Montana led to further such reforms. Among those reforms was the Montana Campaign Practices Act, which established the Office of the Commissioner of Political Practices and provided for the formation of political action committees (PACs). More recently, campaign finance reform has focused on control of contributions to political campaigns. In 1983, Montana became the first state in the United States to limit aggregate PAC contributions to state legislative campaigns. In 1985, Montana required that PACs be named to reflect the economic or special interest of a majority of its contributors.

In 1994, the voters of Montana, through Initiative 118, joined voters of several other states to pass laws which set new, sharply reduced contribution limits to political campaigns. In Montana these new limits were set at \$100, \$200 or \$400 per contested election, depending on whether a candidate was running for local or statewide office. The initiative was in response to skyrocketing growth in campaign fund-raising and spending. Contributions to legislative candidates increased over 600% between 1976 and 1994; 58% from 1992-1994. Large contributions made up approximately one-quarter of all campaign contributions given in legislative races for the 1992 election.

In sum, many elected officials must spend a disproportionate amount of time raising money on political campaigns. If democracy is to survive, such a system must be reformed.

Psalm 72 reads in part:

*"Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give*

*deliverance to the needy and crush the oppressor."*

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Footnotes:

"Before and After the Passage of Initiative 118- the 1994 Montana Campaign Finance Reform Initiative" preface by C.B. Pearson and Jonathan Motl: "Contributions to legislature candidates [in Montana] increased from \$278, 609 in 1979 to \$1,770,476 in 1994, a growth of over 600%.

Recent legislature elections show a dramatic increase from \$1,115,668 in 1992 to \$1,770,476 in 1994, a 58% growth. The amount spent in 1996 legislature campaigns declined slightly.

The average U.S. Senate candidate must raise \$12,000 each week if a six year term to finance his/her re-election. In an op-ed article in August, 1997, Secretary of State Mike Cooney noted that Montana Congressman Rick Hill would need to raise \$12,833/week between August, 1997 and the 1998 election in order to match the cost of his 1996 campaign (Billings Gazette, 8/31/97).

Montana Legislative races are considerably less costly, amounting to an average of \$3,593 per House seat and \$6,698 per Senate seat in 1996. 1994 legislative races were more costly: \$4,423/House and \$8,965/Senate on average. Recently, some Montana legislative candidates have spent over \$25,000 on individual campaign. (Commissioner of Political Practices, "State of Montana Campaign Financing 1996")

**Montana Association of Churches**

American Baptist Churches of the Northwest \* Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) in Montana  
 Episcopal Church Diocese of Montana \* Evangelical Lutheran Church in America-Montana Synod  
 Presbyterian Church (USA)-Glacier Presbytery \* Presbyterian Church (USA)-Yellowstone Presbytery  
 Roman Catholic Diocese of Great Falls-Billings \* Roman Catholic Diocese of Helena  
 United Church of Christ of Montana-Northern Wyoming Conference \* United Methodist Church Yellowstone Conference