

## *~ Clean Elections ~*

*Can Your Government Really Work For You? YES! Find Out How!*

By Roni Beall, defacto Washington Public Campaigns Chair, League of Women Voters of Bellingham, Whatcom County Board Member

The Bellingham Whatcom League of Women Voters held its September General Meeting on Saturday, September 22 at the Bellingham Library. The topic was public campaign financing: what it is, how it works elsewhere, and how it might work in Washington State.

The speakers included Dr. Todd Donovan, WWU political science professor who specializes in elections representation. He provided the historical perspective on this vital topic: why Public Financing is seen as a solution to too much money in politics and too little representation of "We the People".

Washington Public Campaigns (WPCs) statewide Executive Coordinator, Craig Salins spoke eloquently on the topic after the audience viewed the "Votes for Sale," which shows how publicly funded (aka:"clean") elections works in Maine and Arizona. Salins then made a compelling case for implementing similar legislation in Washington State.

Salins also told the audience about three pieces of "clean campaign legislation" which was on the table in the '07 legislative session. Each piece was designed to bring clean campaigns to Washington State in a different arena. One was a local "enabling statute" which, if passed, would allow local jurisdictions such as the city of Bellingham, or Whatcom County to fund selected local elections if they so chose. The second was a judicial bill designed to allow supreme court judges in our state to run using public funds. This was originally proposed by Governor Gregoire when it became clear that outside money was flooding into the '06 supreme court races, essentially un-leveling the playing field between the judicial races. The third bill which the legislature considered would have allowed candidates for statewide races to campaign using public funds (estimated to cost less than \$4 per resident per year). In Maine and Arizona, this type of funding has actually discouraged expenditures by 529 organizations. It has reduced the number of incumbents running unopposed. It has increased diversity in gender and ethnicity in elected offices, and it gives minor political parties a better chance at being elected.

The way candidates qualify to get on the ballot (and therefore get public funds to run) is determined by their ability to gather a defined number of signatures, each with a small donation (not to exceed a stated amount) of usually \$5 to \$10. This "threshold" mechanism keeps out candidates who are not serious and/or who don't really have broad support in their communities, and yet allows people such as social workers and teachers to run for office who otherwise could never compete with well heeled or well connected candidates.

But most importantly, money is taken out of the equation. Candidates and elected officials no longer fear voting against corporate agendas designed to enrich corporations at the expense of the people in their districts or states. Candidates can still choose to run a traditional campaign, though if the Maine and Arizona model hold true, more and more candidates opt to "run clean" each election cycle such that in Maine, fully 80% of candidates (incumbents and challengers of both major parties) are now choosing to "run clean". This allows them to be unfettered by special interests, allows them to spend more time talking to their constituents (and legislating), and far less time "dialing for dollars>'

The audience was clearly impressed by the concept of clean campaigns and what it could do for our state, and several officeholders and candidates spoke on the topic after hearing the presenters. Harriet Spanel and numerous other officeholders and candidates spoke in favor of implementing clean campaign financing, not only at the state level, but also at the federal level. Those wishing to learn more about this can contact [whatcom@washclean.org](mailto:whatcom@washclean.org), or may visit [washclean.org](http://washclean.org).