

SPRING 2008

King County Councilmember
Bob Ferguson

www.kingcounty.gov/ferguson



bob.ferguson@kingcounty.gov
www.kingcounty.gov/ferguson

(206) 296-1001
516 Third Avenue, Room 1200
Seattle, WA 98104

PUBLIC CAMPAIGN FINANCING

Dear Neighbors:

The cost of running for local elected office is skyrocketing and competition for these positions is anemic. What are the consequences to our democracy?

- Major donors wield disproportionate influence
- Incumbents rarely face serious challenges
- Underrepresented communities have one more hurdle to political representation
- New ideas are kept out of the political process

The good news is that there is an alternative to this gloomy picture: public campaign financing. Public financing frees up candidates to talk to voters and focus on the issues rather than dialing for dollars. And it allows people to run for office who, under our current campaign finance system, lack the ability to raise large sums of money to be competitive.

Inside this newsletter you will read how we have the opportunity to bring public campaign financing, or voter-owned elections, to King County. The County Council recently approved legislation, which I sponsored, to study what a public financing system might look like in King County.

Important questions need to be addressed, particularly the cost of implementing a public financing system. Ultimately the decision rests with you – any public financing proposal must be approved by the voters.

Please join me as I bring the King County Council to our district for a special **Town Hall Meeting on public campaign financing on Monday, May 19**, in Shoreline.

Sincerely,

Bob
Bob Ferguson



THE BASICS OF PUBLIC

What is public campaign financing?

Public campaign financing – or “voter-owned elections” – is public funding given to a candidate once he or she demonstrates broad grassroots support.

How does a candidate qualify for public campaign financing?

A candidate must demonstrate viability by raising a set number of small contributions from a large number of voters in their district. For example, in a King County Council race, a candidate might qualify for public financing if they raised \$5 contributions from 500 individuals.

After verification, the candidate becomes eligible for a set amount of public financing sufficient to run a credible campaign.

What are the benefits of public campaign financing?

Public campaign financing allows candidates to focus on the issues that voters care about, rather than dialing for dollars. It also removes the undue influence of special interests and promotes competition for office.

On the King County Council, it is rare to see a serious challenge to incumbents, and the fundraising disparity between challenger and incumbent is one of the primary reasons incumbents rarely face serious competition to retain their seats.

How much public financing does a candidate receive?

It depends. The legislation I sponsored will explore which county races are suitable for implementation

of public financing and how much money candidates need to run a credible campaign for those offices.

Does a candidate have to use public financing?

No. The program is voluntary and candidates can raise money the old fashioned way if they choose.

What if a candidate receiving public financing is significantly outspent by her opponent?

Some jurisdictions allow a candidate to access emergency matching funds of up to three times the original amount if their opponent outspends them significantly or if there are major outside expenditures in the race. This feature deters incumbents from engaging in excessive private fundraising.

Who decides if King County will have public financing?

You. Any plan the County Council develops to bring public financing to our local races must be approved by a vote of the people.

Are other jurisdictions using public financing?

Many jurisdictions, including seven states, have established programs for voter-owned elections, and are realizing their many benefits.

In Maine, over 80% of the candidates for state legislature opt for public financing. And more people are participating in politics there than ever before. More female candidates emerged after Maine instituted this reform and the percent of incumbents without a general election challenger dropped from 16.5% to 1.3%.¹

¹Maine Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices: 2007 Report on the Maine Clean Election Act (<http://maine.gov/ethics/>)

CAMPAIGN FINANCING

How much will public financing cost taxpayers?

We do not know, which is why I asked for a study that will look at the fiscal impacts of implementation and oversight of public financing in King County.

I am interested in pursuing a pilot program, focused only on County Council races, to lower costs and provide an opportunity to see if we obtain the benefits other jurisdictions are experiencing.

Tell us what you think!

The King County Council will be discussing public campaign financing at a special Town Hall Meeting. See reverse side for time and place.

Want to learn more about public campaign financing?

Listen to my "King County Conversations" podcast with Craig Salins, Executive

Director of Washington Public Campaigns, or view my Comcast Newsmakers interview, by visiting my website at www.kingcounty.gov/Ferguson/Multimedia.



As your elected representative, I appreciate hearing your comments and concerns. Please fill out the form on the reverse, add a stamp, and drop it in the mail. You can also email me at: bob.ferguson@kingcounty.gov.

Stamp

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516 Third Avenue, Room 1200
Seattle, WA 98104-3272

ACTION-GRAM



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JOIN US Town Hall Meeting on **Public Campaign Financing**

Monday, May 19, 2008
6 p.m. Public Reception
6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Meeting
Shoreline Room, Shoreline Conference Center
18560 1st Ave NE, Shoreline

ACTION-GRAM

As your elected representative, I appreciate hearing your comments and concerns. Please fill out this form, place a stamp on the reverse side, and drop it in the mail. You can also email me at: bob.ferguson@kingcounty.gov.

Name: _____

Email Address: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Comments: _____
