



# Money in Politics

## What would happen if we took big money out of politics?

- Elected leaders would be accountable only to the voters.
- A more diverse pool of candidates would be able to run for office—those who have community support but don't have big donors.
- Citizens would have the opportunity to control government policies.
- Elected leaders could focus on the issues rather than fundraising.

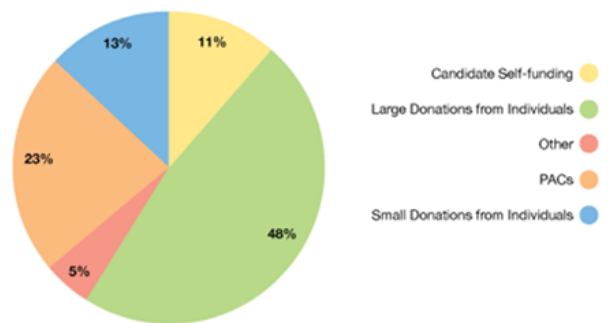
## Fundraising and Spending by Candidates:

Money influences who wins. In races for U.S. Congress, the candidate with more money wins their race about 90% of the time.

**Where does the money come from?** In many races, large donors dominate. In the 2010 Minnesota governor's race, 53% of the money came from individual donors of \$500 or more.

This pie chart shows sources of funds in U.S. Congressional races.

Source of Funds to 2010 Congressional Candidates



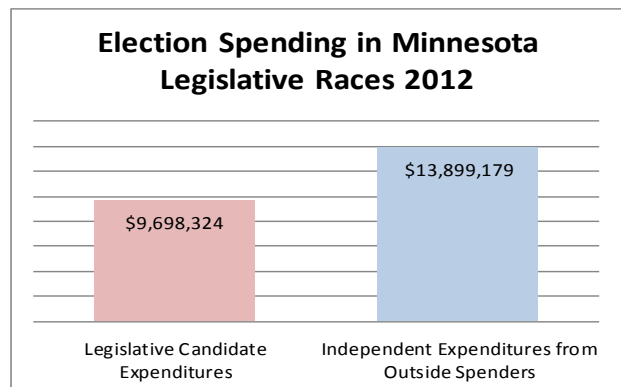
[www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org)

## Independent Spending and Citizens

### United:

- Political parties and committees raise money and make "independent" expenditures, that is, without the candidate's involvement or consent. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United* opened the floodgates to independent spending by corporations.
- In Minnesota, 2012 was the first year that independent spending exceeded spending by legislative candidates on the ballot. Independent spenders spent \$4 million *more* than the candidates themselves.

### Election Spending in Minnesota Legislative Races 2012



## Partial Public Financing in Minnesota

A candidate for governor or the legislature may receive up to half the spending limit for the campaign if s/he meets strict qualifying requirements and agrees to a spending limit. The program is funded by an annual legislative appropriation and by citizens who check off a designated box on their state income tax form. Minnesota also has a political contribution refund program.



These programs help hold politicians accountable to the voters rather than to special interests, but **not all candidates participate** in the public funding program (e.g., Pawlenty in 2006 and Dayton in 2010) and since 1996, **private fundraising has been a more significant source** of campaign contributions than direct public funds.

# What Reforms are Needed in Minnesota?

## Improve Disclosure of Independent Spending:

- Minnesota lags behind [25 other states](#) by not requiring disclosure of “**electioneering communications.**” Independent spenders should have to disclose who is behind ads and how much they are spending.
- Legislation that would have required disclosure failed in 2013-14 because a few Minnesota special interest groups want to maintain a veil of secrecy with respect to their donors.

## Improve the Minnesota Campaign Finance Website:

- Online publication of contributions and expenditures is key to transparency.
- The website should make it easy and quick to find information.
- The Minnesota website needs an overhaul. Visit the State of Washington’s [website](#) to see a robust, citizen-friendly model.

## Implement a Small Donor Empowerment Program

- Small donations to viable candidates could be matched with public funds at a multiple ratio. So if Minnesota provided a 5-1 match and a citizen donated \$50 to a campaign, the candidate would receive \$250.



- **Benefits:** Increases the value of small contributions so that candidates can focus more on constituent engagement and less on fundraising; Increases candidates’ engagement with communities of modest means; Improves voter choice by allowing a more diverse pool of candidates.

**Electioneering Communications:** Ads that run in close proximity to an election and advocate for the election or defeat of a candidate without using “magic words” such as “vote for” or “defeat.”



## Take Action:

- Tell your Minnesota legislators, your U.S. senators and representatives, and candidates running for office that you support increased disclosure and increased public financing.
- Write a letter to the editor. Urge the media to cover money in politics *and* reform efforts.
- Curb the influence of large, private donors by checking the box on your Minnesota tax form to give \$5 to the State Elections Campaign Fund.
- Participate in Minnesota’s [Political Contribution Refund program](#).
- Join LWV Minnesota and support campaign finance reform in our state.

## Learn more:

- An [interactive website](#) from The Campaign Finance Institute allows you to see how small donor matching would increase the number of small donors in Minnesota.

- LWV Minnesota’s 2013 report, [The Tip of the Iceberg: How Minnesota’s Campaign Finance Laws Limit Transparency](#).
- [Empowering Small Donors in Federal Elections](#), a report by the [Brennan Center for Justice](#).



[League of Women Voters Minnesota](#), a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. We take positions on public issues but never support political parties or candidates for office.