

Campaign Finance Reform

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This issue is a 2011-2013 LWVIL Action Focus.

On January 1, 2011, PA 96-0832 took effect fundamentally changing the way Illinois regulates the use of money to influence political campaigns. For the first time Illinois has limits on contributions that individuals, corporations, unions and associations, and PACs can make to candidates and political parties in primary and general elections. Additionally, the new law imposes some limits on the movement of money between political committees in primary elections. It is important to note that PA 96-0832 does not provide for limits on contributions from political party and legislative caucus committees to candidate political committees in general elections.

PA 96-0832 also created a Campaign Finance Reform Task Force charged with considering a system of public financing by State government for the conduct and finance of election campaigns, and conducting a thorough review of the implementation of campaign finance reform legislation in Illinois.

In September 2012, the Task Force, as required by law, reviewed a section of PA 96-0832, set to sunset July 1, 2013, limiting giving from candidates to political party committees in primaries to \$50,000. The Task Force recommended that there should be no limits on giving from candidates to parties during primary elections because these types of contributions exceeding \$50,000 were not being made prior to or after the legislation was enacted.

The Task Force held a hearing on Independent Expenditures in Campaigns prior to submitting a report to the State on February 1, 2013. The LWVIL presented a statement at a January 17, 2013 hearing calling for greater transparency in elections, and for closing loopholes in Illinois' Election Code by requiring greater disclosure of independent expenditures and disclosure of entities or individuals making contributions to independent expenditure committees. During testimony, the League and other presenters acknowledged their support for public financing of campaigns. The Task Force Chair stated that this support would be noted in the Task Force report.

In the 2012 Spring Legislative Session, the League opposed a section of SB 3722. This bill now PA 97-0766 removed limits on all contributions to all candidates running in an election where spending by an independent expenditure committee (or super PAC) reaches a threshold amount of \$250,000 in support of a candidate in a statewide race or \$100,000 for all other elective offices. The Illinois General Assembly passed this measure after Personal Pac won a federal lawsuit demanding the right to raise money without limits for activities that would not be coordinated with candidates. In the 2012 Election, there were two state legislative races where a single organization spent more than \$100,000 uncoordinated with the candidates. In those races, no candidates raised money in excess of the contribution limits. The independent expenditures for the 2014 State Constitutional offices will likely be greater than in the 2012 State Legislative races resulting in more undisclosed contributions and outside influence in campaigns.

The LWVUS 2012 Convention adopted a motion supporting a comprehensive program to educate members and communities on the issue of campaign finance in order to inform the League's education and legislative efforts as needed. The LWVUS appointed a Campaign Finance Task Force to serve as a resource to the LWVUS Board and provide information and input on campaign finance issues including short-term and long-term strategies for reform. The Task Force has provided information on Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission and analyzed proposed constitutional amendments relating to Citizens United that have been introduced in the U.S. Congress.

