



PROGRESSIVE DANE WORKING FOR PUBLIC FINANCING OF LOCAL ELECTIONS. *JOIN US!*

Progressive Dane is an independent local political party that works on elections and public policy in Dane County. This year, we've selected public financing of local elections as our central issue. Experiments are happening all over the country¹. We want to design systems that would work in our own cities, villages, towns, and/or county. We think many other local jurisdictions in Wisconsin would be interested in doing the same thing.

How does public financing work?

"Clean" or "Voter-Owned" elections provide substantial or 100% funding to candidates who choose to forego private fund-raising and who can show a minimum level of community support. Participation is voluntary. Candidates choosing public financing demonstrate their viability by gathering signatures and collecting a set amount in small contributions (e.g., not over \$20). Those who qualify receive public funds in return for not accepting private contributions. Candidates subjected to last-minute attacks by their opponents could receive extra funding to reply. The systems are funded in a variety of ways but usually rely on tax revenues.

Why bother?

We think that public financing of political campaigns, coupled with sensible limits on spending, could bring several important benefits:

- Local offices often involve heavy time commitments and little compensation. Being free of the fund-raising burden may encourage more qualified candidates to run, especially people of low or moderate income.
- Public financing gives voters and candidates time to talk to one another about issues they care about rather than scrambling for money.
- Public financing makes it less likely that a few large donors could influence a key local election.

We think people are tired of the power of money in elections. In November, 2000, 90% of voters in 59 Wisconsin counties voted to support limits on campaign spending and contributions and full disclosure of electoral activities. Things haven't improved much since then.

What's the first step?

Local governments do not have the authority to change the way elections are financed.² A change in the state statutes is needed. We hope that Representative Mark Pocan and Senator Fred Risser will introduce such a bill this fall³, but it's not clear how easily it will pass. Support from municipalities all around Wisconsin would help to move it forward.

Once we have enabling legislation, each jurisdiction would be free to design a local financing system that meets its needs.

Contact us.

To keep up with Progressive Dane's work on voter-owned local elections, check www.prodane.org. For questions, contact office@prodane.org or call 608-257-4895. Or come to the

PROGRESSIVE DANE AUTUMN ASSEMBLY, October 10. All are welcome.
Watch our website for time and place.

¹ [Local Public Financing Charts](#), on line at the Center for Governmental Studies, www.cgs.org

² For a legal analysis by Madison City Attorney Michael May, see legistar.cityofmadison.com/meetings/2009/3/7911_A_BLUE_RIBBON_COMMITTEE_ON_CLEAN_ELECTIONS_09-03-25_Agenda.pdf.

³ For a sample law, see the version introduced in 2001 but not passed: www.legis.state.wi.us/2001/data/AB-421.pdf