

## **Voice of the People**

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### **People or corporations?**

The case for public financing of congressional election campaigns was stated well by editorial writer Steve Hoffman in his April 19 column headlined "Willing to pay for a cleaner Congress?"

Big money pollutes politics. Large amounts of money from wealthy individuals, corporations and other special interests are less "donations" than they are "investments" -- with expected returns.

Public campaign financing moves toward donors and voters being one in the same.

Elections have become private political playgrounds of the privileged, in which candidates spend large amounts of time raising money, rather than being public political arenas where candidates' proposals are presented and ideas from people without money are heard.

Enacting a system of full public financing is certainly essential at the federal level. It's also essential at the state and local levels.

Several states already provide qualifying candidates for public office a limited amount of public financing. Locally, citizens in Akron in 2000 and 2001 tried to enact such a system -- which was opposed by most local politicians and the media.

Yet enacting full public financing will not ensure a level political playing field. Abolishing the right of corporations to be involved in elections is also required.

Last year, voters in Humboldt County, Calif., passed an ordinance prohibiting out-of-county corporations from donating(investing) within the county. Organizers and the public knew that the effort violated the U.S. Supreme Court's 1976 ruling that corporations have a First Amendment right to donate(invest) in political campaigns.

Yet, those California voters enacted the initiative anyway, setting up an eventual challenge where the question will be called: Who has greater rights, people or corporations?

Full public financing is needed in Akron, Alaska and Capitol Hill.

But real integrity of elections will never happen until corporations, which are nothing more than legal creations of the state, are put in their rightful spot: outside the electoral system.

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