



# Clean Money, Clean Elections

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By Paula Hansen,  
Metro Justice Member

The late, great representative Shirley Chisolm said it best when she coined her campaign slogan “Unbought and unbossed.” She knew that campaign dollars come with lots of strings attached, strings that don’t always lead to the best public policy. In New York State we have seen the results of all these strings being pulled – dysfunctional state government.

We are all too familiar with the scenario of wealthy contributors: lobbyists flush with corporate dollars, roaming the hall of congress. In New York State alone, there are 15 paid lobbyists for each representative. Only 1% of the population contributes any significant sum to campaign coffers. Each representative has to raise approximately \$1,000 each working day just to stay competitive in their bid to be elected. For ordinary citizens, this means that even thinking about running for political office is out of the question. Thoughtful, competent candidates are disqualified from the beginning for the simple reason that they don’t have the necessary cash.

There is a solution to this dilemma: Clean Money, Clean Elections (CMCE). A relatively simple, yet elegant way to fund campaigns. Participation is voluntary. Those that wish to run using this money would have to raise a set number of individual \$5 contributions along with the already required signatures. In return for their pledge not to use any of their own money, or money from other sources, they would receive a set number of dollars for a primary election and again for the general election should they win. If their opponent decided to raise funds the traditional way, and exceeded the amount given to the clean money, clean elections candidate, the funds would then be matched up to a certain point.

Where would the money come from? Several states have already enacted legislation that use either a \$5 surcharge for all state taxpayers or an increase in fines paid for traffic violations.

Has it been successful? Maine and Arizona have used Clean Money, Clean Elections legislation to elect governors, a majority of the state houses and has resulted



**Senator Beth Edmonds**  
(D- Cumberland, ME)

I remember the first time I decided to go to talk to the spokesperson of a large employer in the district. And I thought, this person will want to give me money. And I’ll be able to tell him ‘No’ that we would have a different kind of relationship. And that feeling was very reassuring.

in a shift in the focus of legislation. Senator John McCain has endorsed this plan for his and other states. Legislators have seen a dramatic shift in their focus from spending time raising money, to spending time focusing of the issues that matter.

Clean Money, Clean Elections resulted in more women, more minority citizens running for and being elected to public office. As Sen. Ed Youngblood (R-Hancock and Penobscot Counties, ME) put it, “It’s a good way of giving government back to the people... It lets people who are not well-connected run for the legislature.”



**Senator Peter Mills**  
(R- Kennebec, ME)

It was refreshing not to have to raise money, or in some cases spend my own... I feel a certain independence from certain special interest groups. It was nice to be able to say “Thanks for the thought, but I’m running clean.”

How will it happen in New York? The current administration under Governor Pataki has little interest in this legislation. However, Elliott Spitzer has stated publicly that he supports Clean Money, Clean Elections. Louise Slaughter has also shown interest, and Metro Justice members have met with her aides and urged her to take leadership on CMCE. We need to get the word out, by sending postcards, showing up at rallies and doing whatever else it takes so that they can see clearly that this is something supported by many New Yorkers. ■

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

CMCE is a proven, common sense solution that will bring fairness and accountability to New York’s campaign finance system, so that we get candidates and policies that represent all New Yorkers.

- Help start our postcard campaign.
- Write and call Louise Slaughter, urging her to lead this campaign.
- Join our Rapid Response Team.
- Attend a CMCE Metro Justice workshop.