



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Midwest Reform Groups Urge President Obama to Support Federal Public Financing Legislation**

### ***Make Elections about Voters and Volunteers, Not Big Money Donors***

CHICAGO — In a letter sent to President Obama today, Midwest Democracy Network partner organizations called on President Obama to “use the full powers of the White House” to make much-needed public financing reforms of congressional and presidential elections a reality.

“From our vantage point in America’s heartland,” the letter states, the groups “strongly believe the two most important steps that can be taken to reform Washington, D.C.,” are enactment of the bipartisan:

- **Fair Elections Now Act**, sponsored by Sens. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) and Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), which reforms congressional elections with a mix of public financing and incentives for small donations, and
- **Presidential Funding Act**, sponsored by Sens. Russ Feingold (D-Wis.) and Susan Collins (R-Maine), which revamps the antiquated presidential public financing system and fixes a currently ineffective program.

The letter also notes that when President Obama served in the U.S. Senate, he co-sponsored both bills. It continues: “In response to the Midwest Democracy Network’s questionnaire on political reform sent to all presidential candidates and made public in late November 2007, you expressed your strong support for both a voluntary public financing system for congressional elections and a revitalized public financing system for presidential campaigns.”

According to the letter, public financing of federal campaigns is an antidote to a “pay to play system” in Washington that has earned the public’s disgust and undermined confidence in the federal government’s capacity to tackle the enormous problems facing the country.

“The pivotal role that these massive campaign contributions played in creating the national financial crisis represents just one more example of the enormous costs to citizens and taxpayers that come from federal candidates being dependent on special interest groups, lobbyists, bundlers and big campaign donors,” the letter says.

The signing groups ask President Obama to “make these common sense bills a priority” and “make our elections about voters and volunteers instead of big money donors.”

The Midwest Democracy Network is a nonpartisan alliance of more than 20 civic and public interest groups based in Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin. The Network also includes prominent academic institutions and respected national policy and legal experts who partner with the state-based organizations in projects aimed at improving democratic institutions in the five-state region.

Read the letter, which was also sent to the congressional delegations in the five-state region, find out which Network partners signed on, review President Obama’s answers to the Network’s questionnaire, and learn more about the federal public financing of elections on the Midwest Democracy Network website: [www.midwestdemocracynetwork.org](http://www.midwestdemocracynetwork.org).

The 23 organizations signing the letter to President Obama include:

**Illinois**

Illinois Campaign for Political Reform – Network Steering Committee Member  
Chicago Appleseed Fund for Justice  
Common Cause Illinois  
Illinois PIRG  
League of Women Voters of Illinois  
Sunshine Project, University of Illinois at Springfield

**Michigan**

Michigan Campaign Finance Network – Network Steering Committee Member  
Common Cause of Michigan  
League of Women Voters of Michigan  
Michigan Election Coalition  
PIRGIM

**Minnesota**

TakeAction Minnesota – Network Steering Committee Member  
Common Cause Minnesota  
Heartland Democracy  
League of Women Voters of Minnesota  
Minnesota Council of Nonprofits

**Ohio**

Ohio Citizen Action – Network Steering Committee Member  
Common Cause/Ohio  
LWV-Ohio  
Ohio PIRG

**Wisconsin**

Wisconsin Democracy Campaign – Network Steering Committee Member  
Common Cause Wisconsin  
WISPIRG

To download a copy of the letter, please visit:

[http://midwestdemocracynetwork.org/files/pdf/campfin/MDN\\_letter\\_to\\_Obama\\_FINAL.pdf](http://midwestdemocracynetwork.org/files/pdf/campfin/MDN_letter_to_Obama_FINAL.pdf).

Below are excerpts of relevant responses by President Obama to the “Midwest Democracy Network Presidential Candidate Questionnaire on Political Reform,” released February 28, 2008:

**Issue: Presidential Public Financing System**

**Question I-B:**

If you are nominated for President in 2008 and your major opponents agree to forgo private funding in the general election campaign, will you participate in the presidential public financing system?

**OBAMA:** Yes. I have been a long-time advocate for public financing of campaigns combined with free television and radio time as a way to reduce the influence of moneyed special interests. I introduced public financing legislation in the Illinois State Senate, and am the only 2008 candidate to have sponsored Senator Russ Feingold’s (D-WI) bill to reform the presidential public financing system. In February 2007, I proposed a novel way to preserve the strength of the public financing system in the 2008 election. My plan requires both major party candidates to agree on a fundraising truce, return excess money from

donors, and stay within the public financing system for the general election. My proposal followed announcements by some presidential candidates that they would forgo public financing so they could raise unlimited funds in the general election. The Federal Election Commission ruled the proposal legal, and Senator John McCain (R-AZ) has already pledged to accept this fundraising pledge. If I am the Democratic nominee, I will aggressively pursue an agreement with the Republican nominee to preserve a publicly financed general election.

**Issue: Congressional Public Financing**

**Question I-C:**

If elected President, would you support and work to enact legislation creating a voluntary public financing system for congressional candidates?

**OBAMA:** Yes. I am a cosponsor of the Fair Elections Now Act because I believe it imperative that we get big money out of the political process. That's why I have also made the pledge that my campaign will not accept money from special interest PACs or registered federal lobbyists.

For the complete set of questions and responses, please visit:

[www.midwestdemocracynetwork.org/index.php/projects/article/presidential\\_questionnaire\\_2008](http://www.midwestdemocracynetwork.org/index.php/projects/article/presidential_questionnaire_2008).

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