

Cleveland Park Citizens Association
Membership Meeting
June 9, 2016

The meeting was called to order in the Community Room of the 2nd District police station by President Gina Polidoro at

PANEL ON CAMPAIGN FINANCING REFORM FOR DC

The panelists were:

- Moderator, Walter Smith, Executive Director of DC Appleseed
- Mary Cheh, Ward 3 City Councilmember
- Kesh Ladduwahetty, Chair, DC4Democracy
- Karl Racine, DC Attorney General
- Dan Smith, US PIRG, Director of the Democracy Campaign

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Karl Racine. . . agreed that public financing would be in the public interest because it would allow less funded candidates to compete.

Dan Smith said US PIRG (Public Interest Research Group) is a federation of groups in 27 states addressing a range of issues including promoting democracy by ensuring that every citizen has an equal voice. The democracy effort focuses on small donor public financing bills designed to counter the undue political power of wealthy economic interests. DC law allows a donor to contribute up to \$2000 to a mayoral candidate, which few citizens can afford. In the last election, 60% of contributions came from large donors in and outside DC; only 5% came from donors contributing \$100 or less. The proposed Fair Election Act would encourage grass roots candidates by using public funds to match 5:1 contributions of \$100 and less. It would incentivize candidates to appeal to small donors and encourage broader civic engagement. Smith said that NYC has the most established example of this. In the last city Council race there, 61% of contributions [*or 61% of the total contributed-?*] were made in small amounts. Public funding of elections in NYC amounts to .06% of the city's budget. The DC proposal for \$4M is .067% of DC's \$6B annual budget. Connecticut and Maine have systems that encourage small donors; consequently Maine has the most blue collar office holders, and Connecticut has a very diverse legislature.

Mary Cheh pointed out that the need for campaign money is often to pay for radio and television advertising, which doesn't apply to DC's small territory. Karl Racine countered that unless big money donations are limited, DC can expect more advertising.

Kesh Ladduwahetty said that DC4Democracy began as DC for [Howard] Dean. The organization's goal is to promote the common good and encourage greater civic

engagement. She pointed out that political power has always been unevenly distributed; as race and gender barriers became less overt in elections, money has become more significant. Money in politics undermines confidence in government, promotes cynicism, disengages citizens, and destroys democracy. She said that 62 national and local organizations are involved with the DC Fair Elections Coalition sponsoring small donor empowerment legislation.

For more information about this topic, visit www.DCFairElections.com.