



NEWS RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

The New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC), today released recommendations designed to strengthen the Gubernatorial Public Financing Program and simultaneously preserve taxpayers' dollars.

According to Owen V. McNany, III, Chairman of the Commission, ELEC proposals would "shift the balance of the program from one reliant on public dollars to one more reliant on private dollars."

"At the same time that taxpayers' dollars would be preserved," said McNany, "the Commission's package of recommendations would effectively advance the electoral process by permitting candidates to spend more in the primary and requiring publicly-funded candidates to participate in three debates instead of two in each election."

To preserve public funds, the Commission has recommended that the primary and general election public funds caps be reduced to \$1 million and \$2 million respectively, to be adjusted for inflation in 1997. The 1993 public funds caps were \$1.6 million per candidate in the primary election and \$3.9 million per candidate in the general election.

In addition, the Commission is recommending that the matching ratio of public-to-private dollars be lowered from two-for-one to one-for-one in the general election and that the income tax check-off be increased from one dollar to three dollars.

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"At a time when it is critically important to guard carefully the expenditure of public funds," said McNany, "these recommendations will slow and lower the expenditure of public funds and restore balance to the gubernatorial elections fund. Moreover, the check-off increase will raise more money so that the program is fully funded."

The Commission maintains that the proposals would save taxpayers millions of dollars in a gubernatorial election year and not interfere with the integrity of the gubernatorial public financing program or the electoral process. According to the Commission's estimates, its recommendations would have saved \$5.6 million in 1993.

Commissioner David Linett said that he was "particularly supportive of two Commission recommendations that would enhance competition in primary elections."

"One of the goals of the public financing program is to level the playing field in gubernatorial elections and provide qualifying candidates, whether they are well-known or not, or well-funded or not, an opportunity to get their candidacies off the ground and communicate their messages to the public," said Linett.

He said that by increasing the expenditure limit in the primary election to \$3.5 million for 1997 from the 1993 primary election ceiling of \$2.6 million, and by requiring three debates, the Commission is advancing the objective of a level playing field.

Vice Chairman William Eldridge said that he strongly favored a sixth recommendation that would prohibit false political advertising by candidates.

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"I think the public is concerned about the use of public dollars for the purposes of negative advertising," said Eldridge. "While I realize that any statute regulating negative advertising must pass constitutional muster, it certainly is in the best interest of the public to explore the possibilities."

Eldridge continued: "It is very important for the public financing law to encourage debate on the issues and to discourage reckless advertising that is false and deliberately misleading. The Commission is confident that a statute can be carved that would protect freedom of speech but at the same time encourage the positive discussion of ideas."

Summary of Commission Legislative Recommendations

1. Reduce the primary and general election public funds caps in 1997 to \$1 million and \$2 million respectively, adjusted for inflation;
2. Lower the general election matching ratio of public-to-private dollars from two-for-one to one-for-one;
3. Increase the income tax check-off to \$3;
4. Increase the primary election expenditure limit to \$3.5 million in 1997;
5. Require three debates of publicly-financed candidates in each election; and,
6. Prohibit false political advertising.

Summary of Public Financing Provision in 1993

1. Primary Election Public Funds Cap - \$1.6 million *
- General Election Public Funds Cap - \$3.9 million *
2. Two-for-one primary and general matching ratio
3. One dollar income tax check-off
4. Primary Election Expenditure Limit - \$2.6 million *
- General Election Expenditure Limit - \$5.9 million *
5. Two primary election and two general election debates.

* Adjusted every four years for campaign inflation