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Open Democracy Action and Bipartisan Legislators' Group Announces Legislation to Balance 'Big Money' Campaign Funding With 'Voter Dollars' System

Open Democracy Action and its bipartisan Legislators' Working Group today unveiled their proposal to create a voluntary alternative to the current system of privately-financed political campaigns.

"Voters across the political spectrum overwhelmingly agree that 'the system is broken' – and needs to be fixed, so that citizens' voices can be heard," said Open Democracy Action Executive Director **Olivia Zink**. "One of the fundamental principles of our government is that elected officials are supposed to represent the people, not campaign donors. But that has gotten lost in the flood of private money funding political campaigns in recent years."

"I fear we are moving to a situation where only the rich can run for higher office. That is not what our founding fathers had in mind. Government of the people, and *by the people* is the foundation of our democracy," said **Sen. Dan Innis** (R-New Castle), a member of the Legislators' Working Group that crafted the legislation. "Too much money has shifted the voice to those with the most money and influence. It is time to stop the big money politics."

The legislation announced today would allow political candidates to opt-out of "the Money Primary" and instead fund their campaigns with small-dollar contributions from constituents supplemented with "Voter Dollars" from a special state Fund. The New Hampshire Legislature has repeatedly proposed and studied systems of public funding for campaigns, in order to solve the problem of private donor influence.

"As the former chair of a legislatively-created study committee on the subject, and having observed the deterioration of our public discourse since, largely due to the effects of too much money in politics, I cannot stress enough the need for campaign finance reform," said Manchester attorney **Brad Cook**, who chaired the bipartisan 2008 *Commission to Study the Feasibility of Public Funding of State Election Campaigns*. "The effects of big money in politics are many: deterring good candidates from running, drowning out the voices of quality candidates without personal wealth or connections, over-weighting the opinions of wealthy individuals and corporations. While this may not be at the top of many people's political agenda this year—it should be. I urge everyone to take heed of the efforts being announced at this press conference, to do something about this serious issue."

The unanimous Cook Commission report found that "a system of voluntary public funding of state election campaigns is in the best interest of New Hampshire." It also identified a variety of revenue sources to fund the system. The report is available at

<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/statstudcomm/reports/534.pdf>.

“I think that we’ve played with this issue of campaign financing long enough,” said **Rep. Kathleen Hoelzel** (R-Raymond), a member of the Working Group who will be the prime sponsor of the new “Voter Dollars” bill. “I think we have it right this time. It’s bipartisan, and it will go through the hearing process as every other bill does.”

“Our citizens’ legislature and our New Hampshire democracy are threatened by the money from powerful out-of-state special interests working to undermine our elections,” said **Rep. Robert “Renny” Cushing** (D-Hampton), also a member of the Working Group. “We need to act now to protect our right to govern ourselves, and not be governed by those who have the most money. The future of our democracy depends on us getting the dirty money out of our elections.”

“It’s been an honor to work with this group of legislators to craft this bill,” said Open Democracy Co-Chair **Rick Bourdon**. “We’re bringing it forward now because we know that many voters are extremely interested in fixing ‘money in politics.’ Today’s announcement puts a specific – bipartisan – proposal on the table for candidates and voters to talk about before the November election.”

The most recent state poll on the issue found that 80% of Granite Stater voters believe “Big Money” is a problem in New Hampshire elections. The poll can be found at https://www.opendemocracynh.org/nh_poll_12-2017.

Sen. Martha Hennessey (D-Hanover) is also a member of the Working Group that crafted the bill. The bill drafting group is part of the 80+ member bipartisan “Reformers Caucus” of state legislators coordinated by Open Democracy Action. “We look forward to working with *all* the legislators who care about this issue, to get this bill passed during the upcoming legislative session,” Bourdon said.

“We talk about a lot of issues as being crises, but protecting the integrity of our democracy from the corrupting influence of moneyed interests must be our first priority. Without a functioning democracy, we cannot properly address any of the other existential threats to our country and world,” said **Rep. Ellen Read** (D-Newmarket), another member of the Working Group. “I am so proud to join with other legislators on this bill, and with citizens from every political background to reclaim democracy for the people.”

“I support the bill,” Hoelzel added. “We need to do something about campaign finance.”

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