



"Westerfeld, Andrea" <awesterfeld@kentlaw.edu> on 05/06/2003 09:06:53 AM

To: "pubfund2004@fec.gov" <pubfund2004@fec.gov>
cc:

Subject: Comment on Proposed Rule Changes

Ms. Dinh,

I would like to comment on the proposed changes in matching fund policies relating to the payment of candidate salaries, 11 CFR 9004.4(b)(6), 9034.4(b)(5). I support the change as a means of encouraging candidates of modest means to run for the office of President.

Part of the rationale behind the provision of matching funds is to encourage the candidacy of more than just the independently wealthy, and provide something of a level playing field for all the qualified candidates in terms of fundraising. Elections grow longer and more expensive each year, with primary campaigns now beginning up to two years before the Presidential election. This represents an enormous commitment of time on the part of the candidate, to say nothing of the expenditures of their own funds. The practical result is a self-limitation of the field to only those candidates who are independently wealthy.

This is becoming a stronger concern for the American public, which starts to feel disconnected from the very people who are supposed to be representing them in our nation's highest office. It is no coincidence, I think, that an issue raised by both the major party nominees in the last Presidential election is the disconnect between the other party's "trust fund baby" candidate from the average American voter. It is difficult to see a way to completely remedy this issue, but allowing candidates to use matching funds in order to draw a salary may help alleviate the problem somewhat.

A serious candidate devotes an immense amount of time and energy to his campaign and, as stated previously, these campaigns are running for a longer time each year as candidates struggle to be the first one out of the gates to catch voter attention. A candidate of more modest means would find it difficult to not only devote this amount of time to the campaign but also go the entire time without a salary for his own personal and family expenses. Candidates who draw a salary are able to devote their entire attention to the campaign. Allowing federal matching funds to be used for this purpose means that candidates are not forced to raise extreme amounts of money before gaining this benefit. It would level the playing field at least somewhat among all the candidates.

I do, however, have some reservations about the potential abuses inherent in the system. Taxpayers are not likely to appreciate seeing federal funds go to pay salaries to multi-millionaires. The system is as subject to exploitation as any other means of public funding, and thus needs stringent safeguards. The proposed rule already prohibits candidates who are federal employees drawing a federal paycheck from using matching funds for salary.

This is presumably to prevent the double payment of federal funds, and is an excellent start. However, if the intention is to level the playing field among all candidates, then any candidate drawing a salary should be exempted from the provision. Only those candidates devoted entirely to the campaign and not receiving personal funds from any other source should be permitted to use matching funds for candidate salary, in order to give all candidates an equal footing.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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