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Watchdogs: Limit funding in campaign for governor

Individuals and PACs in state can give as much money as they want



By **Mary Beth Schneider**
Posted: August 4, 2008

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With the race for governor funded by a wave of six-digit checks, government watchdogs are renewing their push for reforms to put the brakes on [Indiana's](#) anything-goes approach to campaign financing.

The state's few limits, critics say, open the door to undue influence by deep-pocketed contributors, discourage lesser-known candidates from running and have turned political campaigns into an endless stream of TV ads.

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Indiana is one of only 12 states that let individuals and political action committees give candidates unlimited amounts of money.

DATABASE: Search the 2007-08 campaign finance filings of gubernatorial candidates

Indiana's only limits are on corporations and labor unions, which can give no more than \$5,000 per year to all statewide candidates -- a limit easily avoided

by forming a PAC.

That freewheeling system has helped the Democratic candidate for governor, former U.S. Rep. Jill Long Thompson, stay competitive with [Republican](#) incumbent Gov. Mitch Daniels.

She raised about \$1.6 million in April through June, the most recent reporting period, which nearly matched the \$1.8 million raised by Daniels.

But about half of Long Thompson's money comes from two sources: the Service Employees International Union, which has given her \$925,000 since she began her campaign last year; and Emily's List, the Washington-based group that backs Democratic women who support abortion rights, which has given her

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Top donors in governor's race

Top donors to Republican Gov. Mitch Daniels:

- Republican Governors Association, \$875,000.
 - Northeast Indiana PAC for Better Government, \$203,000.
 - Steve Chancellor, Evansville, \$200,000.
 - Dean White, Merrillville, \$190,000.
 - Scott Jones, Carmel, \$186,000.
 - Robert Compton, Germantown, Tenn., \$138,500.
- (Totals are since 2005, when he began his term in office.)*

Top Donors to Jill Long Thompson, Democrat:

- Service Employees International Union, \$925,000.
 - Emily's List, \$454,255.69.
 - Democratic Governors Association, \$125,000.
 - Barbara Lee, Cambridge, Mass., \$66,025.24.
 - International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Education Committee, \$24,000.
- (Totals are since 2007, when she began her campaign.)*

Contribution limits in various states

- States that have no campaign contribution limits of any kind: Illinois, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Virginia.
- States that have no contribution limits on individuals and political action committees: Alabama, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Virginia.
- States that have full or partial public financing for at least some candidates: Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska.
- States that have full public financing for governor's candidates: Arizona, Maine, Connecticut.

Sources: Campaigns of Daniels and Long Thompson, National Conference of State Legislatures

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more than \$450,000 so far.

Daniels also has been fueled by big-money donors, receiving \$875,000 from the Republican Governors Association and \$200,000 from Evansville coal executive Steve Chancellor.

"To me, it's really an indictment of the current system," Julia Vaughn, policy director of Common Cause/Indiana, said of the numbers.

Other states have tried to address the issue.

"More and more states are saying 'let's take elections -- in particular gubernatorial elections, because there are so many millions of dollars being spent -- off the auction block,'" Vaughn said.

Along those lines, state Rep. Matt Pierce is holding a legislative hearing this month on whether Indiana should limit how much money someone can give a candidate, and whether Indiana should join the three states -- Arizona, Connecticut and Maine -- that now have full public financing of the race for governor.

"I've always been disturbed by these large sums of unlimited contributions that are in the process, particularly at the gubernatorial level," said Pierce, a Bloomington Democrat who is chairman of the House Elections and Apportionment Committee. "My idea is to at least have it discussed."

But, Pierce said, while voters "don't like the big money, they don't necessarily support the prevailing ideas on how you'd get the big money out."

"The average person will say, 'Yeah, I'm outraged about all this big money and special interests controlling the system,'" he said. "But on the other hand, if you say 'how about a public financing system where everyone would be on an even plane,' then they get really cranky and say, 'I don't want my tax dollars going to some grubby politician.'"

How about a \$5 limit?

Vaughn said that voluntary public financing is working in the states that have adopted it. More candidates who in the past would have been turned off by the daunting task of raising millions of dollars are running, she said.

She'd like to see Indiana adopt a system akin to Arizona's, in which candidates raise only \$5 from individuals who can vote for them -- token sums used to show they are legitimate candidates.

The candidates then receive a set amount of money from the state, from a pool funded by court fees, and can receive additional funds if they are outspent by an opponent who has opted out of the public financing system.

Both Long Thompson and Daniels say they are interested in looking at campaign finance reforms in Indiana.

Daniels -- who as governor pushed a law change requiring quarterly reporting of contributions to state candidates -- said he'd like to see even more frequent reporting, with statewide candidates having to report their contributions monthly or even weekly.

But, he said, he's opposed to limiting how much an individual or PAC can give.

"I've never been a fan of it," he said. "I think my preference would be just full information. Hoosiers can judge for themselves if they want an election bought by somebody in Washington, D.C. or somebody with a non-Indiana motive."

Long Thompson said she wants to see law firms and other limited-liability corporations, which can give unlimited contributions, held to the same limits as regular corporations. And she wants to ban anyone with a state contract from

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She said she's willing to look at limiting individual contributions as well.

But while she said the state should discuss public financing, "given the state of the economy, I think this would certainly not be a time to ask taxpayers for one more thing."

Arguments against it

Jim Bopp, a Terre Haute attorney who is counsel to Daniels' campaign and a Republican National Committee member, has argued five campaign finance cases before the U.S. [Supreme Court](#).

Though proponents say limits will open the door to more candidates, Bopp argues the reverse, saying doing so makes "it much harder for people of average means to run for office."

Public financing, he said, "typically does not provide adequate funds for people to run effective campaigns."

That, said Camilla Strongin, spokeswoman for the Arizona Republican Party, is something Indiana should think about before following her state's approach. She said challengers need a lot of money to compete against an incumbent who is better known.

In 2006, the two candidates for governor in Arizona both agreed to public financing, and together they had less than \$3 million to spend. In Indiana's 2004 race for governor, Daniels and his Democratic opponent, Gov. Joe Kernan, raised and spent a combined \$33 million.

"The concept sounds wonderful," Strongin said of the campaign finance reforms that are called "Clean Elections" in Arizona. "We're going to get more people in public office doing their civic duty. But I don't know that you could point to Clean Elections and say that's really happened. The warning to any state that's looking at it is, 'Look long and hard to see if it really eliminates the issues that voters seem to be concerned about.' "

Vaughn sees that \$33 million spent in 2004 in Indiana as one more reason for a change.

"Time and again the public is saying we think this is a lot of good money being wasted," she said.

Call Star reporter Mary Beth Schneider at (317) 444-2772.

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GaryGB wrote:

Replying to Parman:

Replying to Webeenutz:

how about this one. let those running for office, use their own funds to campaign; especially those who are running for seats out of their own states. get in your own car, fill up your own tank and hit the road. as far as the presidential election is concerned, let them only campaign off funds that people choose to donate on tax forms. this would alleviate "favors" given to unions and corporations, due to large donations to campaign coffers. hardest hit would be the democratic party, who gets major money from unions. they'd surely cry about this one.

Yeah! We wouldn't want the dems to give any more "favors" to corporations like the big drug and oil corporations. They already get enough from the

repugnants.

Next you will tell us that demorats don't take money frombig-oil and big-drug companies.

Do you have anymore dis-information?

8/4/2008 2:41:40 PM

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wamitche wrote:

Replying to Webeenutz:

how about this one. let those running for office, use their own funds to campaign

So this would mean that only the wealthy could run for office? Even a very small campaign can cost thousands just to get your name and political stance out to the voters. So few read the paper anymore and the bias of many publications makes it difficult to get free, honest exposure. The people we might want in office, someone who knows what it is like to suffer from taxes, gas prices, and poor governance would never get the chance to be elected. I am not saying we should have unlimited funds to campaign with, but saying use only the candidates own money pretty much makes us a class systems of Lords and serfs with the rich being the only ones who stand a chance.

8/4/2008 11:39:46 AM

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Redbeardgaarr wrote:

Limiting the amount any single entity (corporation, single person, organization, whatever) can contribute isn't a bad idea. Maybe it would spare us the idiotic campaign commercials. Mandatory debates might not be a bad idea either. Oh, and the dissolution of the political parties. They're useless.

8/4/2008 11:29:18 AM

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iconoclast wrote:

Banning all political ads on TV would eliminate the need for about 95% of the money. Restricting all political campaigning to the 30 days before an election would be nice too. Just a thought.

8/4/2008 9:54:35 AM

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indyd wrote:

You are right, public financing is a bad idea. Who wants our roads, bridges, schools and all the other government contracts awarded to the most qualified firms. They should be awarded to whomever pays the most in campaign contributions.

Contracts are awarded to companies that contribute financially to a political campaign. These contracts are paid for by tax money. They are already publically financed. The tax money gets cycled back into the political party. At least add some accountability.

8/4/2008 9:36:06 AM

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