



“DEMOCRACY DOLLARS” PROPOSITION ON NOVEMBER CITY BALLOT DESERVES YOUR VOTE

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Over a decade ago, Albuquerque voters sent the city an important message: Big money plays too large of a role in our city elections. Back in 2005, dismayed by both state and local scandals, Common Cause volunteers successfully circulated petitions to amend the city charter to start a public financing program for local campaigns to give ordinary people--not just big donors--a role in city elections. This initiative was passed by 69% the city’s voters. The result was the creation of City’s Open and Ethical Elections Program, which has been used by Republican and Democratic candidates for city council and mayor ever since.

But now, Albuquerque’s public financing system is showing its age. It has been hemmed in by federal court decisions and outpaced by the rising cost of campaigns. Thankfully, a new group of community organizations has a solution that will not cost new taxpayer dollars, and will revitalize our municipal elections, where low voter turnout has become the norm.

Advocates, who collected over 28,000 signatures last year to get the measure on the ballot, are calling the modernization initiative, “Democracy Dollars.” It will be Proposition 2 on the November ballot, and it deserves your vote.

How does the “Democracy Dollars” program work? First, the basics of the city’s public financing program remain the same—candidates who forgo private contributions, and who qualify by collecting enough signatures and small \$5 contributions, get a stipend from the city at the beginning of their campaign. The original rationale remains the same: public financing frees candidates from the burden to raise large private contributions and allows them to focus on individual voters whose community interests they represent.

In this new hybrid system, the voices of ordinary citizens will have even more value.

The City Clerk will mail each voter a \$25 coupon to contribute to a participating candidate of his or her choice. Candidates can redeem them at face value with the City Clerk’s office. The vast majority of



citizens who aren't able to make monetary contributions under the present system, will now have a way to contribute, and gain a new stake in our democracy.

For candidates, this program will be an incentive to reach out to everyday voters, not just the big donors, whom studies show are unrepresentative of the community. Candidates will spend more time knocking on doors and talking about local—not special—interests with voters. That, we believe, is fundamental to a thriving democracy.

“Democracy Dollars” will require no additional funding for a number of years. Funding for the coupons, will come from existing funds in the Open and Ethical Elections Fund, which, according to the city code, is fed by annual general fund allocations of 1/10th of 1% every year. The fund, now at \$3.1 million, has built up a surplus ever since the Supreme Court ruled that one part of the existing program (a provision allowing participating candidates to collect more public funds if they are outspent) was unconstitutional. As a result, the fund is now growing by \$500,000 every year.

Seattle already has a successful Democracy Dollars system in place, and the program has been taken up in cities across the country. Studies from the University of Washington and Seattle’s Ethics and Elections Commission show that in 2017, campaign contributors were more representative of the electorate, with a significant increase of younger and low-to-moderate-income contributors. More candidates participated as well, with many stating they would never have been able to run without Democracy Dollars.

In a healthy democracy, participation is the name of the game. A vote for Proposition 2 encourages a more diverse group of candidates and voters. It restores competition for publicly financed candidates, and most importantly, restores public confidence in our political systems, something we desperately need.

Visit www.BurqueBucks.org to learn more.

Heather Ferguson is Executive Director of Common Cause New Mexico. Common Cause is a nonpartisan grassroots organization dedicated to upholding the core values of American democracy. Common Cause is part of **ABQ Democracy Dollars**, a coalition of community groups, which includes the Center for Civic Policy, Equality New Mexico (EQNM), Organizers in the Land of Enchantment (OLE), and the Working Families Party of New Mexico.

