



**Statement by Common Cause  
Committee on House Administration  
Markup of H.R. 94, H.R. 95 & H.R. 1994  
June 4, 2013**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for today's markup of H.R. 94 "To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to prohibit the use of public funds for political party conventions," H.R. 95 "To reduce Federal spending and the deficit by terminating taxpayer financing of presidential election campaigns and party conventions," and H.R. 1994, the "Election Assistance Commission Termination Act."

Common Cause is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to restoring the core values of American democracy, reinventing an open, honest, and accountable government that works for the public interest, and empowering ordinary people to make their voices heard.

Before the committee members today are three items of legislation that could profoundly impact the way we administer and finance national elections. At stake is the survival of the public financing system for presidential elections and a commission that could play an important role in standardizing and modernizing election administration if partisan politics were put aside. In the interest of ensuring a fair, ethical, and accessible system of elections, Common Cause urges Congress to reject H.R. 94, H.R. 95, and H.R. 1994.

Common Cause opposes H.R. 94, as this bill would eliminate the provisions of the Internal Revenue Code that authorize public funding for presidential nominating conventions. Eliminating public financing for conventions will cause political parties and their host committees to become even more reliant on money from large corporations, lobbyists, and other special interests to finance their conventions.

In 2012 alone, the GOP raised a staggering \$55 million for its convention in Tampa, largely from corporations and special interest groups.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the DNC, which pledged not to accept funds from special interest groups, depended on at least \$5 million directly from corporations and another \$7 million from wealthy donors contributing \$100,000 or more.<sup>2</sup> Removing public financing will dramatically increase the need for private funding for these expensive events and provide the special interests who meet this need with unprecedented access to elected officials and policy makers. As special interest donations increasingly dwarf public funding for conventions, the voices of average Americans are drowned out by those who have a vested interest in government action (or inaction). In order to curb the flow of special interest dollars into the political process and promote a democratic government that truly represents its citizens, public financing rules for party conventions should be modernized, not eliminated.

For similar reasons, Common Cause opposes H.R. 95, because it vitiates an important check on special interest money by eliminating public financing for presidential campaigns and nominating conventions. The current public financing system needs meaningful reform and needs to be updated to accommodate the new reality of campaign fundraising in a post-*Citizens United* world. Before the introduction of copious amounts of soft money in the 1990s and the *Citizens United* decision, the infrastructure worked; campaigns were financed by the public, not by special interest groups. Every major presidential candidate from both political parties used the system for a generation of elections, and it worked. While the current system is now in need of extensive reform, wholesale elimination of public funding of elections is not the answer. In 2012, outside groups spent over \$565 million in the presidential race alone,<sup>3</sup> and campaigns spend an unacceptable amount of resources fundraising to match the SuperPACs. This reality means that important issues facing the country take a backseat to keeping up in the spending race. Candidates and campaigns should be focused on issues, not on fundraising.

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<sup>1</sup> Russ Choma, "Small Donors, Billionaires, Corporations and a Loan Funded Party Conventions," *Open Secrets Blog*, Oct. 18, 2012, <http://www.opensecrets.org/news/2012/10/bank-of-america-and-billionaires-fund-conventions.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Biesecker, "Dem Convention Used Corporate Cash, Despite Pledge," *Associated Press*, Oct. 18, 2012, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/dem-convention-used-corporate-cash-despite-pledge>.

<sup>3</sup> Center for Responsive Politics, "Outside Spending," Table: Top Groups, Excluding Party Committees, 2012, <http://www.opensecrets.org/outsidespending/> (last accessed June 3, 2013).

Public financing of campaigns serves another important purpose: eliminating the appearance of corruption in the office of the President. Put in place following the Watergate scandals, public financing sought to reduce the role of money in elections and prevent the appearance or reality of having a President beholden to special interests. Big money in elections, especially after *Citizens United*, is corrosive to government accountability. Now is the time to upgrade our presidential public financing system to empower small donors, not eliminate it. Common Cause urges you to reject H.R. 95.

Common Cause opposes H.R. 1994, the Election Assistance Commission Termination Act, because it would eliminate a resource that should be a critical part of the government's effort to ensure that our elections are fair, efficient, and accessible. Established in the wake of the widespread election administration failures in the 2000 election, the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) was created to address serious problems with our voting system that can suppress voter participation and turnout, including long lines at polling stations and outdated voter registration procedures. In theory, the EAC serves every American voter by conducting research, collecting data, and sharing information among elected officials, the public, and interested organizations. The EAC also oversees the distribution of federal funds that assist states and municipalities with election administration.

The EAC has not been fully staffed since 2009 and has been acting without commissioners since December 2011. The commission exists to create standards and guidelines that reflect the newest and best methods of election administration, but, without commissioners, is unable to update its recommendations. The EAC's ability to modernize and continually improve election administration practices is severely threatened by its lack of commissioners. In light of the many challenges faced by our state and local election administrators and the serious procedural problems that weaken voter access and participation, Common Cause believes that this is a time to reaffirm our commitment to voting rights and fair elections by strengthening the EAC and providing it with the staff it requires to function effectively. H.R. 1994 would eliminate an important tool for improving a voting system fraught with problems and should be rejected.

Common Cause urges Members of Congress to reject all three of the aforementioned bills, H.R. 94, 95, and 1994. The Presidential Funding Program and the EAC are important components of an honest and fair election system that suffer from congressional neglect and gridlock, not from any inherent flaw. Instead of eliminating these important democracy reform tools, members of this Committee and both parties in Congress need to work together to strengthen and expand our public financing system for presidential elections to provide the Election Assistance Commission with the resources it needs to perform its duties.

Thank you again for allowing Common Cause to submit this statement. We look forward to working together to improve the integrity and effectiveness of campaign finance laws and election administration.