

MEMORANDUM

To: Interested Parties

From: Celinda Lake, David Mermin, and John Norris; Lake Research Partners
Brian Nienaber, Ashley Rich; The Tarrance Group

Re: National polling on support for a proposal to tackle big money in
Congressional elections(1)

Date: February 2009

In an environment dominated by economic concerns, **a new bipartisan poll reports that voters strongly support a proposal to address the influence of big money and lobbyists in Congress by providing qualified candidates limited public funding in exchange for their accepting no large contributions.**

This support is driven by a sense of urgency for change in Washington DC, including the way elections are funded and due to the strong perception that members of Congress are indebted to their wealthy contributors rather than average constituents.

Key Highlights

More than two-thirds of voters (67%) support providing qualified congressional candidates a limited amount public funding if they agree to take no large contributions, while just 20% are opposed and 11% are undecided. Furthermore, a larger percentage of voters favor this proposal “strongly” (44%) than those who are opposed or undecided combined.(2)

- **Every major demographic group solidly favors the proposal.** This includes support across party lines (69% of Democrats, 64% of Republicans, and 66% of independents). Even the least supportive demographic group still favors the proposal by a 2-to-1 ratio.

The call for change includes the way elections are financed.

Four out of five voters (81%) believe we need to change the way elections are financed, including a majority (54%) who call for “major” changes.

Most voters believe the problem is getting worse. Nearly three out of five voters (57%) believe that our campaign finance system is getting worse, compared to only 5% who think it is improving.

A solid majority of voters believe Congress prioritizes the will of their political contributors rather than constituents. Sixty percent of voters say members of Congress are more likely to vote in a way that will please their political contributors, compared to just 20% who think that they vote for the best interests of their constituents.

Voters see large campaign contributions as a roadblock to solving the most pressing economic issues facing America. More than three quarters (79%) of voters agree with the statement "I am worried that large political contributions will prevent Congress from tackling the important issues facing America today, like the economic crisis, rising energy costs, reforming health care, and global warming."

- **This sentiment is held strongly across the board, regardless of party affiliation.** Voters across party lines agree with the statement above (82% agree for Democrats, 79% agree for independents, 77% agree for Republicans).

Voters believe that the influence of campaign money given to members of Congress was a "major factor in causing the current financial crisis on Wall Street." Nearly three in four voters (73%) said that they thought large campaign contributions from the banking industry led to lax oversight, with 56 percent agreeing strongly with the sentiment.

- **This is also held strongly across the board, regardless of party affiliation.** Voters across party lines agree with the statement above (76% agree for Democrats, 68% agree for independents, 74% agree for Republicans).

1 Lake Research Partners and the Tarrance Group conducted this bipartisan survey of 800 likely voters nationwide conducted February 2-6, 2009. The survey was commissioned by the Congressional Fair Elections Coalition.

2 Text of proposal: Under this plan, candidates for Congress could run for office without raising large campaign contributions. Instead they would collect a large number of small contributions from their home state in order to qualify for a limited amount of public funding for their campaign. They would be prohibited from taking any contributions over 100 dollars or any contributions from lobbyists. Contributions of 100 dollars or less would be matched with public funds on a four to one basis, up to a strict limit.

For more information on this survey, contact Celinda Lake or David Mermin at Lake Research Partners (202-776-9066) or Brian Nienaber or Ashlee Rich at the Tarrance Group (703-684-6688).