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INTERESTS,  
PARTISAN POUTS,  
AND THE USUAL  
SUSPECTS

*A Study of Donors to  
New Jersey's "Clean Elections"  
Candidates in 2007*

by  
By Sean Parnell, Laura Renz,  
and Sarah Falkenstein



CENTER *for*  
COMPETITIVE  
POLITICS

*Congress shall make no law...*



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February 2009

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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I.	Introduction	1
II.	Finding 1: Interest Groups	3
	a) Analysis	3
	b) Discussion	4
III.	Finding 2: Partisan Perceptions	7
	a) Analysis	7
	b) Discussion	8
IV.	Finding 3: Donor Background	10
	a) Analysis	10
	b) Discussion	12
V.	Conclusions	16
VI.	Special Report: Summary of Findings and Conclusions	19
VII.	Appendices	21
	a) Select Comments	21
	b) Methodology	23
	c) Survey Text	24
	d) Raw Data	26



# Special Interests, Partisan Pouts, and the Usual Suspects

## *A Study of Donors to New Jersey's "Clean Elections" Candidates in 2007*

### INTRODUCTION

In 2007, the state of New Jersey conducted its second experiment with taxpayer-funded political campaigns, often called "clean elections" by advocates of such programs.

Significant research has been previously conducted, by the Center for Competitive Politics (CCP) as well as others, on the outcomes of the 2007 experiment. CCP has generally concluded that the 2007 experiment failed to achieve most of its stated goals,<sup>1</sup> although others consider the pilot project to have been successful primarily by focusing on the number of candidates who succeeded in qualifying for taxpayer funding while ignoring or stretching other goals and definitions of success.<sup>2</sup>

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1 See *Appendix 5: Conclusions and Recommendations on New Jersey's "clean elections" Experiment*, May 2008, Center for Competitive Politics, available at [http://www.campaignfreedom.org/docLib/20080527\\_Appendix5.pdf](http://www.campaignfreedom.org/docLib/20080527_Appendix5.pdf)

2 See *Public Campaign Financing: New Jersey Legislature - A Pilot Project Takes Flight*, p.14, Jessica Levinson, Center for Governmental Studies, August 2008. Available at [http://www.cgs.org/images/downloads/cgs\\_nj\\_leg\\_final\\_081808.pdf](http://www.cgs.org/images/downloads/cgs_nj_leg_final_081808.pdf)

Left out of previous analysis has been the actual donors to "clean elections" candidates. Given that the primary goal of taxpayer-funded campaigns is to end candidate's "...reliance on special interest campaign cash" and free them from the interests of "...well heeled donors and lobbyists,"<sup>3</sup> gathering information on the citizens who provided the crucial early support allowing candidates to qualify for taxpayer funds is necessary in order to see if this goal has been achieved.

It is also important to understand how the \$10 qualifying contributions were solicited, what the reason for giving was, and what the donors' perceptions of their elected officials are. This is crucial in gaining a complete understanding of who gives, how and why they give, and what they believe about their elected officials who relied on the "clean elections" program to provide their campaign funds.

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3 See website of Public Campaign, a leading advocate for taxpayer-funded political campaigns, at: <http://www.publiccampaign.org/clean123>

CCP set out to study these donors through a survey mailed to donors to “clean elections” candidates in the 14th and 24th legislative districts, where all major party candidates seeking funding qualified.<sup>4</sup> More than 4,800 surveys were distributed and nearly 800 were returned. A detailed description of the methodology is available in Appendix B.

The purpose of the survey project was to gather and analyze information about these “clean elections” donors in order to better understand their intent, motivation, beliefs, and backgrounds. Included in this analysis is Appendix B, the text of the survey that was sent out to the contributors on New Jersey, which allows us to speak to several important conclusions regarding voter attitude and affiliation in the pilot program districts.

The research that follows is divided into three main findings, addressing following issues:

- Did “clean elections” sever connections between candidates and funds from organized interest groups?
- Can “clean elections” improve citizens’ perceptions of their government and elected officials?
- Do “clean elections” substantially change who contributes to candidates?

The following sections provide analysis and discussion of these three issues.

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4 Because the 3 Republican candidates in the 37th District did not qualify for funding, that district was excluded from our research.



## **Finding 1: Members of major interest groups in New Jersey provided a substantial number of contributions to “clean elections” candidates.**

### **Analysis**

The most significant finding from the surveys was that, despite claims that “clean elections” would end candidate reliance on interest groups for funding, a large percentage of contributions came from citizens who self-identified as being members of interest groups. In three of the four districts, interest group members comprised about half of all contributors, and Republicans in the 14th district received approximately one third of their donations from interest group members. Because the survey relied on donors to self-identify as interest group members, it is likely that some number of those responding declined to provide this information for privacy or other reasons.

<b>Party and District</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Republican, 14th	32%
Democratic, 14th	52%
Republican, 24th	46%
Democratic, 24th	48%

Six interest groups provided the majority of these contributions from interest groups: the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA), National Rifle Association (NRA), Communications Workers of America (CWA), New Jersey Right to Life (NJRTL), Sierra Club, and NARAL Pro-Choice New Jersey.

Members of two groups, both unions, appear to have been relatively bi-partisan in their giving to candidates. Republican candidates in the 14th district received 31% of their interest group contributions from New Jersey Education Association members and 16% from Communications Workers of America members, while their Democratic opponents received 19% and 10%, respectively. Contributions by members of these two groups were almost identical in the 24th district, with NJEA members giving 28% of interest group contributions to Republicans and 30% to Democrats. Both parties’ candidates received 5% of their interest group contributions from members of the CWA.

**In three of the four districts, interest group members comprised about half of all contributors**

**33% of interest group donors to Republicans in the 24th District were affiliated with the National Rifle Association**

<b>Table 2: Interest Group Breakdown</b>					
<b>Interest group</b>	<b>R14</b>	<b>D14</b>	<b>R24</b>	<b>D24</b>	<b>Total</b>
Communication Workers of America	16%	10%	5%	5%	10%
NARAL Pro-Choice NJ	0%	16%	0%	6%	6%
National Rifle Association	17%	3%	33%	4%	12%
NJ Education Association	31%	19%	28%	30%	27%
NJ Right to Life	10%	0%	21%	1%	7%
NJ Sierra Club	1%	11%	3%	15%	7%

Contributions by members of the four remaining interest groups split along more partisan lines. NARAL Pro-Choice New Jersey members accounted for 16% and 6% of interest group contributions for Democratic candidates in the 14th and 24th districts, respectively, while Republican candidates in both districts received no contributions from this group. Republicans fared little better with Sierra Club members, only 1% in the 14th district and 2% in the 24th. Their Democratic counterparts, on the other hand, received 11% of their interest group contributions from Sierra Club members in the 14th district and 15% in the 24th.

Republican candidates in the 24th district fared extremely well with the two remaining groups, with 33% of interest group contributors coming from members of the National Rifle Association and 21% coming from members of New Jersey Right to Life. Republican candidates in the 14th district also received significant support from members of these two organizations, with 17% of interest

group donors coming from the NRA and 10% from New Jersey Right to Life. Democrats did poorly among these two groups, receiving between 0% and 4% of their interest group contributions coming from the membership of these organizations.

Overall, members of the New Jersey Education association led the way in “clean elections” contributions, primarily as a result of their bi-partisan giving. More than one-quarter of contributors had ties to the teacher union. Not surprisingly, this concentration was reflected in the occupational classifications of “clean elections” donors, with nearly one in five contributors reporting an education-related occupation.

**Discussion**

“Clean Elections” are sold as a way to rid politics and elections of the “special interest donors” that allegedly use contributions to gain undue influence with elected

officials.<sup>5</sup> Even if this theory of how contributions affect elected officials was accurate (and most research shows that it is not<sup>6</sup>), it would appear that interest groups are still able to provide substantial support to candidates, contrary to the goals of the program.

Support can be active and overt, such as by having interest groups communicate directly with their members that they should consider giving qualifying contributions to particular candidates, or indirect, such as supplying mailing lists to favored candidates or inviting members to attend a campaign event. In this case, and as discussed further in Finding #3, the support appears to have been primarily indirect.

Regardless, there is little reason to believe that a candidate would feel any less appreciation for an interest group whose membership provided substantial support towards their efforts to raise the required number of qualifying contributions than they would if the group simply contributed directly to their campaign.

If New Jersey continues its experiment with taxpayer-funded

political campaigns, support to “clean elections” candidates by interest groups is almost certain to grow. This is because organized groups of citizens who share a common agenda or interest are ideally situated to aid candidates in gathering qualifying contributions from large numbers of voters, and both candidates and interest groups are certain to recognize the advantages of this type of cooperation.

This is what has happened in Arizona, where Governor Janet Napolitano relied upon labor unions to collect nearly one quarter of the required signatures and \$5 contributions needed for her to qualify for millions of dollars in “clean elections” funding.<sup>7</sup> In a similar case, one state legislator in Arizona relied almost entirely on local right-to-life activists to raise her qualifying contributions.<sup>8</sup>

These are not isolated examples in Arizona of organized interest groups aiding candidates in gathering qualifying contributions. The practice is common enough that the *Arizona Capitol Times* reports that “Special interest groups routinely collect the necessary number of individual \$5 contributions to help candidates

**The *Arizona Capitol Times* reports that “Special interest groups routinely collect the necessary number of individual \$5 contributions to help candidates qualify for public funding**

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5 Web sites of Public Citizen at <http://www.cleanupwashington.org/fairelections/> and Public Campaign at <http://www.publiccampaign.org/clean123>

6 Dr. Stephen Asnolabehere et al, “Why Is There So Little Money in U.S. Politics?” June 2002, MIT at [http://web.mit.edu/polisci/research/representation/CF\\_JEP\\_Final.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/polisci/research/representation/CF_JEP_Final.pdf)

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7 Chip Mellor, *Three Lessons from Arizona, WELFARE FOR POLITICIANS* 31, 37-8 (John Samples, ed., Cato Institute, 2005).

8 Phone conversation with State Representative Marian McClure, August 2008, discussing one of her Republican colleagues.

**Interest  
group “Clean  
Election”  
donors were  
concentrated  
in just 6  
interest groups**

qualify for public funding.”<sup>9</sup>

The fact that approximately half of all donors in three of four districts were members of interest groups, and that such donors were concentrated in just six interest groups, strongly suggests that “clean elections” are not a viable remedy to correct any real or perceived reliance by candidates on interest groups in order to fund their campaigns.

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9 “Clean Elections Institute loses national money stream, seeks donations,” Christian Palmer, *Arizona Capitol Times*, December 29 2008. Available online at: <http://www.azcapitoltimes.com/story.cfm?id=10095#>

**Finding 2: The donor group most supportive of “clean elections” was most likely to believe their own “clean” legislators favored party and special interests over constituent interests.**

**Analysis**

In three of four donor groups, “wanted to see ‘clean election’ program succeed” was the top reason for giving to “clean elections” candidates. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of donors to Democratic candidates in the 24th district cited this as a reason for contributing, and roughly three in five donors to candidates in the 14th district gave this as a reason for contributing (63% for Republicans, 59% for Democrats).

Republican donors in the 24th district were much less favorable towards the program – barely over a quarter of these contributors (27%) attributed their gift at least in part to wanting to see the program succeed.

A fundamental assumption of “clean elections” programs is that separating candidates from contributions by so-called “special interests” will lead to legislators that are more responsive to constituent needs, and that citizens’ opinions of their elected officials should improve as well. If true, we would expect to see the donor group with the highest level of support for the “clean elections” program express high levels of confidence that their legislators, elected with taxpayer dollars and not private contributions, favor constituent interests over those of party leadership or “special interests.”

The data in fact shows the opposite, and dramatically so.

**The donor group with the highest level of support for “clean elections” should have the highest level of trust in their “clean” legislators. They do not.**

**Table 3: “Clean Election” Donor Reasons for Contributing**

Response	R14	D14	R24	D24	Total
Had contributed to the same candidate(s) before	24%	19%	23%	4%	18%
Supported their position on the issues	35%	36%	36%	25%	34%
Wanted to see “clean elections” program succeed	63%	59%	27%	74%	57%
Thought they should be on the ballot	11%	16%	14%	10%	13%
Was asked to by a friend/colleague	8%	10%	8%	11%	9%
Personally acquainted with candidate	28%	30%	42%	19%	30%
Other	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%

**Democratic candidates in the 24th district indicated their party leadership favored party leadership and “special interests” over constituent interests, despite knowing their own state legislators had been elected relying on taxpayer dollars.**

<b>Table 4: “Clean Election” Donor Perception of Legislature</b>					
<b>Response</b>	<b>R14</b>	<b>D14</b>	<b>R24</b>	<b>D24</b>	<b>Total</b>
What they believe the majority of their constituents favor	46%	41%	46%	12%	38%
What they personally believe is best for their constituents	39%	40%	49%	23%	38%
What their party leadership wants	22%	20%	14%	50%	26%
What special interests want	12%	12%	7%	27%	14%
Other	2%	6%	5%	7%	5%

Results for three of the four donor groups were fairly similar, demonstrating a general belief that their Assembly members and Senators sincerely attempt to vote on behalf of their constituents’ interests and not the interests of party leadership or “special interests”. Donors to Democratic candidates in the 24th district, however, indicated in large numbers that they believed their state legislators favored party leadership and “special interests” over constituent interests, despite knowing their own state legislators had been elected relying on taxpayer dollars.

**Discussion**

A significant majority of Democratic donors in the 24th district, knowing that their Assembly members and Senator relied almost entirely on taxpayer dollars and no more than \$10 from any single individual in their district, still believe that their

three current legislators vote more with party leadership and special interests than with the interests of their constituents. What explains this apparent paradox?

The most likely answer can be found in the fact that Democratic donors in the 24th district stand out in one other way - they failed to elect a single member of their party to the State Legislature in 2007, unlike contributors in the other three groups. It can be assumed that the Democratic contributors in the 24th district strongly disagree with most of the positions their three Republican legislators take on public policy issues. This disagreement appears to foster a belief among opposing partisans that their legislators vote against their constituents interests. It should be noted here that the 24th District is heavily Republican, and the three Republican candidates in 2007 won by overwhelming margins.

This would seem to demonstrate that concerns and charges about undue and improper influence by

party leadership and special interests are driven primarily by partisan and ideological differences a citizen has with their elected legislators, rather than any real “corruption” or undue influence. Further evidence that partisan and ideological differences are primarily behind concerns regarding undue influence by party leadership and special interests can be found in the responses by several Republican donors in the 14th district, which is represented by a Republican Senator and two Democratic Assembly members.

In the 14th district, ten (out of 253) Republican contributors added notations to their survey responses, indicating that they believed their Republican Senator, Bill Baroni, voted on behalf of his constituents, while they believed their two Democratic Assembly members voted with party leadership and special interests. As such “ticket splitting” was not given as an option on the reply form, it would seem to indicate a particularly strong perception by these contributors that while the Senator of their own party represented his constituent interests, those of the other party preferred to vote with party leadership and special interests.

It also seems worth noting that two of the three Republican legislators in the 24th district are first-term members, likely ruling out the possibility that the discontent of Democratic “clean elections” donors is connected to legislators previous terms in office,

when they would have been elected with private, voluntary contributions. Only one Republican legislator in the 24th District, Allison Littell McHose, was an incumbent, and 2007 was her first re-election campaign. Perceptions of their legislators’ previous term in office influencing Democratic donors’ perceptions of their current performance is therefore an unlikely explanation.

The dramatically different perspective on their current legislators by Democratic contributors to ‘Clean Election’ candidates in the 24th district, combined with their generally stronger acceptance of ‘Clean Elections,’ illustrates that providing taxpayer dollars to candidates is unlikely to improve citizens’ opinions about their government and elected officials, because those opinions do not appear to be based on candidate’s funding source, but instead are based on whether any given citizen agrees with the ideology and positions of their elected officials.

**24th district Democratic contributors views of their Republican legislature appears driven by partisan and ideological differences.**



A majority of contributions were raised by methods other than personal solicitation by the candidate.

**Finding 3: Many contributors to “clean elections” candidates had never previously given to a political candidate, but most donors were not personally solicited by candidates. There appears to have been little success in bringing in donors from groups that normally do not contribute to candidates.**

<b>Table 5: “Clean Election” Donor Previous Contribution History</b>					
<b>Contributor</b>	<b>R14</b>	<b>D14</b>	<b>R24</b>	<b>D24</b>	<b>Total</b>
Contributors who had previously given to a political candidate	49%	44%	57%	43%	48%
Contributors who had never previously given to a political candidate	50%	54%	40%	56%	51%
Unsure or declined to answer	1%	2%	3%	1%	1%

**Analysis**

The “clean elections” program does appear to have brought new donors into the process who had never previously given to a political candidate.

Overall, the results were almost evenly divided between brand new contributors and those who had previously contributed to a candidate in past elections. Because campaigns typically focus fundraising efforts primarily on individuals who are either past donors to their campaign or

to other campaigns, the high number of donors who had never before contributed to a candidate likely demonstrate that “clean elections” candidates solicited contributions from individuals who may not have been asked to give under traditional fundraising programs.

Although new donors were brought into the process through the “clean elections” fundraising process, a majority of contributions were raised by methods other than personal solicitation by the candidate. Republican and Democratic

<b>Table 6: Method of Solicitation for “Clean Election” Qualifying Contributions</b>					
<b>Method of solicitation</b>	<b>R14</b>	<b>D14</b>	<b>R24</b>	<b>D24</b>	<b>Total</b>
Directly by the candidate	29%	43%	43%	43%	38%
Directly by campaign staff	14%	8%	11%	12%	12%
By a neighbor, friend, or colleague	17%	18%	11%	17%	16%
By mail	31%	8%	27%	8%	20%
By a member of a group you belong to	3%	7%	0%	5%	4%
At an event you attended	13%	20%	4%	15%	13%
Other	8%	7%	7%	7%	7%



candidates apparently focused on different methods to raise the needed contributions. Contributors to Republican candidates were far more likely to report being solicited by mail (31% in the 14th district and 27% in the 24th) than Democratic contributors (only 8% in each district).

Republican contributors in the 14th district were less likely than any other group to be solicited directly by the candidate, and Republicans in the 24th district were the lowest percentage of all groups to be solicited at an event.

Only 4% of donors reported being solicited by members of groups they

belonged to, a very interesting finding given the extraordinarily high number of contributors from a small number of interest groups (discussed in Finding 1).

“Clean elections” donors came primarily from occupations that can be described as middle-class, business, or professional. Very few donors came from blue-collar or low-income occupations.

Overall, the highest self-reported occupations were Education, Business & Professional, and Science & Technology. Health care professionals also ranked highly among 3 of 4 donor groups.

**Very few donors come from traditionally under-represented groups such as blue collar and low-income occupations**

**Table 7: Occupation Categories of “Clean Election” Donors**

Occupation Category*	R14	D14	R24	D24	Total
Business & Professional	16%	13%	21%	15%	16%
Clerical	4%	3%	1%	3%	3%
Education	19%	18%	18%	23%	19%
Finance	9%	0%	5%	4%	5%
Government	3%	1%	3%	1%	2%
Health Care	9%	4%	10%	8%	8%
Homemaker	7%	5%	6%	5%	6%
Legal	3%	7%	4%	4%	4%
Other	4%	9%	6%	4%	5%
Public Service	3%	5%	4%	4%	4%
Science & Technology	10%	17%	6%	9%	10%
Self-Employed	2%	2%	4%	4%	3%
Service	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%
Student	2%	4%	3%	1%	2%
Trade/Labor	3%	3%	5%	6%	4%

\*26% of respondents listed only “Retired” as their occupation and have been excluded from these calculations. These individuals were once in the labor pool and would presumably have been distributed among the occupational categories in roughly similar proportions.

**Candidates still relied heavily on their traditional donor base to raise qualifying contributions**

Groups that might be considered “underrepresented” among donors to traditionally-funded candidates barely registered. Donors in blue-collar trades and skilled labor occupations gave 4% of qualifying gifts, clerical workers represented 3% of contributions to “clean elections” candidates, and low-wage service-sector workers were only 1% of all “clean elections” contributors.

**Discussion**

The large number of new donors to “clean elections” candidates represents a modest success for the program, as one of the goals of the program was to “stimulate voter involvement by encouraging small contributions from individuals.”<sup>10</sup> Whatever success the program had in bringing in new contributors to the process is limited, however, by the fact that candidates did not personally solicit the majority of qualifying gifts as well as the candidate’s heavy reliance on contributors from donors with traditional donor backgrounds.

In all 4 groups of contributors, less than half of all contributions were solicited directly by the candidate, with Republican donors in the 14th district being the least likely to have been personally asked to give by the candidate.

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10 See *ibid* at note 9.

Direct solicitation by members of interest groups on behalf of candidates was more common among Democrats than Republicans, but does not appear to have been a significant factor for either group. Solicitations by interest group members on behalf of a candidate may also be reflected in those indicating they were asked to contribute by a neighbor, friend, or colleague.

This suggests that whatever assistance interest groups may have provided to candidates was primarily informal or behind-the-scenes, rather than direct. For example, Republican candidates may have relied on mailing lists provided by interest groups in order to gather their qualifying contributions, while Democrats may have relied more on events that drew primarily from interest group membership for their invitation list.

Previous research suggests that only between 5% and 10% of citizens contribute to candidates.<sup>11</sup> While “clean elections” candidates do appear to have reached beyond those citizens who regularly contribute to political campaigns, half of the qualifying contributions still came

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11 *The ANES Guide to Public Opinion and Election Behavior*, table “Gave Money to Help a Campaign 1952-2004,” [http://www.electionstudies.org/nesguide/toptable/tab6b\\_5.htm](http://www.electionstudies.org/nesguide/toptable/tab6b_5.htm) by American National Election Studies, and *Small Donors and Online Giving*, p. 6 (sidebar), by the Institute for Politics Democracy & the Internet, [http://www.campaignfinanceinstitute.org/president/pdf/IPDI\\_SmallDonors.pdf](http://www.campaignfinanceinstitute.org/president/pdf/IPDI_SmallDonors.pdf)

from this group. This would seem to indicate that candidates relied heavily on their normal donor base for qualifying contributions, although not as heavily as would have been the case under the traditional system of private, voluntary contributions.

Although “clean elections” candidates solicited qualifying contributions from individuals who might not normally have been asked, the outreach does not appear to have extended beyond groups that candidates traditionally seek funding from. Traditionally, donors to political campaigns come from somewhat higher than average income groups, or at least not low income groups, and are typically from business, professional, or law backgrounds.<sup>12</sup>

The donor pool for “clean elections” candidates appears in this regard to resemble the typical demographic of donors to federal candidates, which is dominated by business executives, attorneys, medical professionals, and individuals from the education or media industries.<sup>13</sup>

This represents a significant failure of the “clean elections” program to the extent that a goal was to force candidates to raise funds (and

interact with) citizens from diverse backgrounds who don’t ordinarily contribute to political candidates. Although not explicitly cited as a goal of New Jersey’s “clean elections” experiment, this does appear to be a goal or at least desirable result among the “reform” community that advocates for taxpayer-funded political campaigns.

A May 2008 study by Public Campaign, a leading advocate of “clean elections,” approvingly stated that *“the demographics of Clean Elections small donors are substantially different from those of big donors to privately funded campaigns... Because Clean Elections candidates “owe” their elections to this more diverse group, many people believe they are more likely to feel free to pursue policies while in office that benefit the general public rather than a small set of big money donors.”*<sup>14</sup>

Public Campaign concludes that *“when candidates rely on small donor qualifying contributions they engage in political participation—by a multitude of demographic measures—a far more diverse group of people than do candidates who choose private financing for their races.”*<sup>15</sup>

**Donors to “clean elections” candidates resemble those to privately funded Federal candidates, which are dominated by business executives, attorneys, medical professionals and those in the education or media industries**

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12 E-mail exchange between author and Clyde Wilcox, a professor of American Government at Georgetown University on 10/21/2008

13 Peter Francia, et. al, *The Financiers of Congressional Elections*, p. 29 table 2.4, 2003, Columbia University Press

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14 Nancy Watzman, *All Over the Map: Small Donors Bring Diversity to Arizona’s Elections*, p18. Public Campaign, May 2008 [http://www.publiccampaign.org/sites/www.publiccampaign.org/files/%20aotm\\_report\\_05\\_20\\_08\\_final\\_web.pdf](http://www.publiccampaign.org/sites/www.publiccampaign.org/files/%20aotm_report_05_20_08_final_web.pdf)

15 See id

**Nearly 1 in 5 donors reported “education” as their occupation, far in excess of the 4% of New Jersey citizens employed in the education industry.**

Although the research by Public Campaign has since been found to contain a significant methodological flaw that brings its data and conclusions into serious doubt,<sup>16</sup> it is clear that donor diversity is claimed as one of the key benefits of “clean elections.”

The failure to achieve significant donor diversity is evident from the occupational backgrounds of “clean elections” donors in New Jersey. Donors from business, financial, legal, and health care professions, along with those in the educational field, dominated donor occupations, accounting for nearly two out of three contributors.

The flawed Public Campaign report cited previously points to a supposedly higher proportion of “blue collar” donors to Arizona’s “clean elections” candidates compared to privately-funded candidates,<sup>17</sup> believing it to be further evidence of the success of Arizona’s program. In New Jersey, even combining government workers, public service employees, and those employed in trades, only 10% of all “clean elections” donors came from what might be thought of as “blue collar” backgrounds.

Some may argue that the high number of teachers and others with educational occupations contribute to

donor diversity, as they fall outside the categories cited by Professor Wilcox as typical of donors to political candidates. This argument has three shortcomings, however.

First, teachers and others employed in the education industry in New Jersey are generally among the more politically active groups in the state, including through the political action committee of the New Jersey Education Association, which spent more than \$1.2 million supporting candidates in 2007. Traditionally funded candidates in New Jersey rely heavily on teachers through their PACs to provide funding for their campaigns; “clean elections” has simply shifted the method of collecting this support from the same donor group.

Second, nearly one in five donors reported “education” as their occupation, a dramatic overrepresentation compared to the number of voting-age New Jersey citizens. Had donors to “clean election” candidates reflected the general population, only 4% of all donors would be from educational

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16 [http://www.campaignfreedom.org/blog/ID.723/blog\\_detail.asp](http://www.campaignfreedom.org/blog/ID.723/blog_detail.asp)

17 See id at note 14, p 11

occupations.<sup>18</sup> By contributing to “clean elections” candidates in significantly greater numbers compared to their population, donors from education-related occupations significantly reduce the overall diversity of “clean elections” contributors in New Jersey.

Finally, individuals with education backgrounds are, in fact, a significant component of the “traditional” donor pool, as measured by contributions to candidates for federal office.<sup>19</sup>

All told, “clean elections” has expanded the total number of contributors to candidates, but does not appear to have reached much beyond traditional donor communities. “Clean elections” may in fact have reduced the diversity of donors to candidates, once the elimination of some contributors such from PACs connected to non-government employee unions is considered.

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18 New Jersey certificated and non-certificated Department of Education employees plus total number employed by public and private colleges and universities in New Jersey is 264,948 as of the 2007-2008 school year. <http://www.nj.gov/education/data/ncs/ncs08/>, <http://www.nj.gov/education/data/cs/cs08/> and <http://www.state.nj.us/highereducation/statistics/EMPL2007.htm>. These numbers do not include private school employees. Total voting-age population was approximately 6,622,000 in 2007 according to the Federal Election Commission, <http://www.fec.gov/pages/bcra/rulemakings/millionairesenate.shtml>.

19 See id at note 15

**“Clean elections” may have reduced the diversity of donors to candidates when elimination of non-public employee union PAC’s are considered**

## CONCLUSIONS

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The three findings reported here provide a valuable look at donors to “clean elections” candidates and through this information we are able to determine what the implications are for the future of taxpayer-funded political campaigns in New Jersey and elsewhere. Based on the information obtained and analyzed, the three key findings can be summarized as follows:

- Nearly half of all “clean elections” donors came from households affiliated with interest groups that regularly engage in political activity such as lobbying or supporting candidates. A majority of these interest group contributors were affiliated with just six groups: the New Jersey Education Association, the National Rifle Association, Communications Workers of America, New Jersey Right to Life, NARAL-Pro Choice New Jersey, and the Sierra Club.
- The donor group that expressed the greatest amount of support for the “clean elections” concept, donors to Democratic candidates in the 24th district, were the most likely to view their current legislators as favoring “special interests” and party leadership over their constituents’ interests, despite the fact that their legislators had been elected with

taxpayer dollars.

- The “clean elections” program brought new donors into the system who likely would not have contributed or even been solicited otherwise, although candidates did not personally solicit a majority of their donations. There is little evidence that candidates solicited or at least received contributions from beyond the traditional donor community of business people and professionals as well as members of politically-active interest groups.

The implications of these findings are clear:

- The large number of “clean elections” contributors who are members of a small number of powerful and influential interest groups show that these groups are still able to provide substantial and valuable support to candidates under systems of taxpayer-funded political campaigns. “Clean elections” are thus unlikely to end any real or perceived “undue influence” connected to their support of candidates.
- Perceptions by voters that elected officials favor “special interest” and party leadership

over constituent interests are more closely tied with partisan and ideological differences with their elected officials and candidates for office than the source of campaign funding, and thus replacing private, voluntary contributions to candidates with taxpayer dollars is unlikely to improve public perception about government.

- Although successful in bringing new donors into the political process, “clean elections” failed to noticeably change the demographics of who gives to campaigns and candidate-to-voter contact was not part of the solicitation process for the majority of contributors. The fact that interest group support for candidates appears to have been primarily indirect also does not change the fact that such support clearly existed.

These three conclusions cast further doubt on the ability of “clean elections” to achieve many of the outcomes promoted by “reform” advocates as among the benefits of replacing private, voluntary contributions to candidates with taxpayer funds.

It is clear from the information presented here that “clean elections” provides at best modest success in relatively minor areas, and generally fails to accomplish the program’s more significant goals such as reducing or eliminating candidates’

reliance on interest groups for campaign funding or improving citizens’ perceptions of government and elected officials. Based on this information, legislators and policymakers would be wise to look to other means to root out corruption and improve citizen confidence in New Jersey.









## Summary of Findings & Conclusions

### Findings

1. Organized interest groups supplied nearly half of all qualifying contributions to “clean election” candidates in the 2007 pilot project
2. A majority of these interest group contributors were affiliated with just six groups:
  - National Rifle Association
  - New Jersey Education Association
  - New Jersey Right to Life
  - Communications Workers of America
  - NARAL Pro-Choice New Jersey
  - New Jersey Sierra Club
3. Donors to “clean election” candidates generally believed their “clean” legislators typically favored the interests of their constituents in three out of four donor groups
4. The donor group who most strongly supported “clean elections” generally believed their “clean” legislators typically favored “special interests” and party leadership
5. The belief that “clean” legislators typically favor “special interests” and party leadership appears to be driven by partisan and ideological differences
6. The “clean elections” program succeeded in getting citizens to contribute who otherwise were unlikely to do so
7. The majority of qualifying contributions were not solicited directly by candidates, and nearly half were solicited by mail or through intermediaries
8. “Clean election” donors skew heavily towards business, professional, and education occupations, similar to typical donors to federal candidates.

### Conclusions

1. “Clean elections” does not prevent organized interest groups from supporting their favored candidates
2. “Clean elections” does not improve citizens confidence in their government
3. “Clean elections” changes how many citizens contribute, but does not change who contributes.



## **APPENDIX A – Comments included with survey responses**

Several surveys were returned with comments, below is a sample of these by donor group.

### **Donors to Democratic Candidates, District 14**

*Clean elections should be outlawed; waste of taxpayers' money.*  
- member of Plumber & Pipefitter Local Union #9

*Clean Elections is a great way to get more people involved in politics and makes everyone feel like they count.*  
- attorney

*I feel requirements to solicit are large number of voters for small contributions encourages more voters to participate in election process, a good provision.*  
- retired

### **Donors to Republican Candidates, District 14**

*I just want to believe elected people would vote for what is best for our state or country, not to better their careers and ambitions. Unfortunately most do not. I feel I supported a person who wants to do what is right and fair.*  
- retired

*NJ politicians have ruined this state. One only has to look at the number of people that are fleeing because of property taxes. Our legislative body continues to borrow and spend at the expense of the taxpayer.*  
- retired

### **Donors to Democratic Candidates. District 24**

*Too much money wasted on campaigns! Those with the most money, whether qualified or not, always wins.*  
- former mayor and council member

*Using tax [dollars] for only specific offices makes it difficult for persons running for offices not included during same election cycle. Also if it continued more restrictions need to be used - in my area candidates used [money] for attending Atlantic City Conventions, dining, and to pay unusually high salaries to friends as "campaign workers" rather than for true campaign efforts. This effort in my opinion was unsuccessful in every aspect and I truly/strongly believe our tax [dollars] can be put to better use. Again program needs more oversight on how the money*

*is used and more thought and planning as to how it affects other candidates running during the same election cycle but barred from participation.*

- homemaker

*Entire process was time, money and paper wasted. My affiliation is none of your concern.*

- retired

*I was very upset that the candidate I contributed to shared his money with another candidate I did NOT endorse. This should not be allowed, I will not contribute again!*

- retired teacher

#### **Donors to Republican Candidates, District 24**

*My experience in Sussex County is that this program doesn't work and it is a waste of money.*

- police officer

*I was outraged that the Democrats were ramming this heinous law down our throats. This Democratic law was an attack on our right to vote and on our republican form of government.*

- retired

*NJ is so corrupt it makes me sick.*

- sales manager

*Entire process was absurd.*

- retired

*This clean elections needs to go! Why should we pay for candidates to run for election – crazy!*

- homemaker

*I thought this a waste of taxpayer money - let candidates foot own campaign. Only benefited N.J. Democrats.*

- farmer

*I don't think anyone should waste or spend so much money on a campaign. You can only run for office if you're rich! I think most candidates are dishonest.*

- food service worker

*Clean elections was a scam set up by the majority party in Trenton.*

- semi-retired consultant

## APPENDIX B - Methodology

CCP authored and distributed surveys to every individual who contributed \$10 to at least one ‘Clean Elections’ candidate in either the 14th or 24th legislative districts of New Jersey, for a total of 4,864 surveys mailed. The names and information for these individuals were obtained using information gathered and made available to the public by New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission based on disclosure forms filed by the candidates.

The returned surveys were categorized and analyzed according to district and party affiliation, the latter being determined by the party of the candidate the donor contributed to.

The surveys were mailed in June 2008, and by the closing date of August 29th, 2008, 798 individual completed surveys had been returned, an overall return rate of 16%. The table below details the number of surveys sent to each district and is also broken down by party registration.

	Republican, District 14	Democrat, District 14	Republican, District 24	Democrat, District 24	TOTAL
<b>Total Sent Out</b>	1081	1620	1267	896	4864
<b>Total Returned</b>	268	199	166	165	798
<b>Wrong Address Returned</b>	15	24	35	14	88

A third district, the 37th voting district, was also a clean elections district in 2007. However, the 37th district was not included in this analysis because no Republican candidates qualified to participate in the “clean elections” program, therefore the analysis would have been limited and not especially illuminating on the overall impression of the program.

We left question 6, regarding occupation, as open ended to allow the respondents more options in how they categorize themselves. The logic behind that was primarily that by allowing respondents to write whatever they wished rather than check off a category from a pre-determined list, we would get a more accurate impression of the respondents. During the analysis, we then categorized the individual responses into the more broad categories references in the paper for purposes of effective analysis.



## APPENDIX C – Survey Text

### “Clean Elections” Survey Questions

1. Did you contribute \$10 to a “clean election” candidate running for either state Assembly or Senate in the 2007 election?

Yes       No

2. If you did contribute, please describe your reason for contributing:

- a) Had contributed to same candidate(s) before
- b) Supported their position on the issues
- c) Wanted to see “clean election” program succeed
- d) Thought they should be on the ballot
- e) Was asked to by a friend/colleague
- f) Personally acquainted with candidate
- g) Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. If you gave, were you solicited:

- a) Directly by candidate
- b) Directly by campaign staff
- c) By a neighbor, friend, or colleague
- d) By mail
- e) By a member of a group you belong to (professional association, union)
- f) At an event you attended
- g) Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Have you ever previously contributed to a candidate not involved in the “clean elections” pilot program?

Yes       No

5. Do you believe your current state Assembly member and Senator generally vote based on:

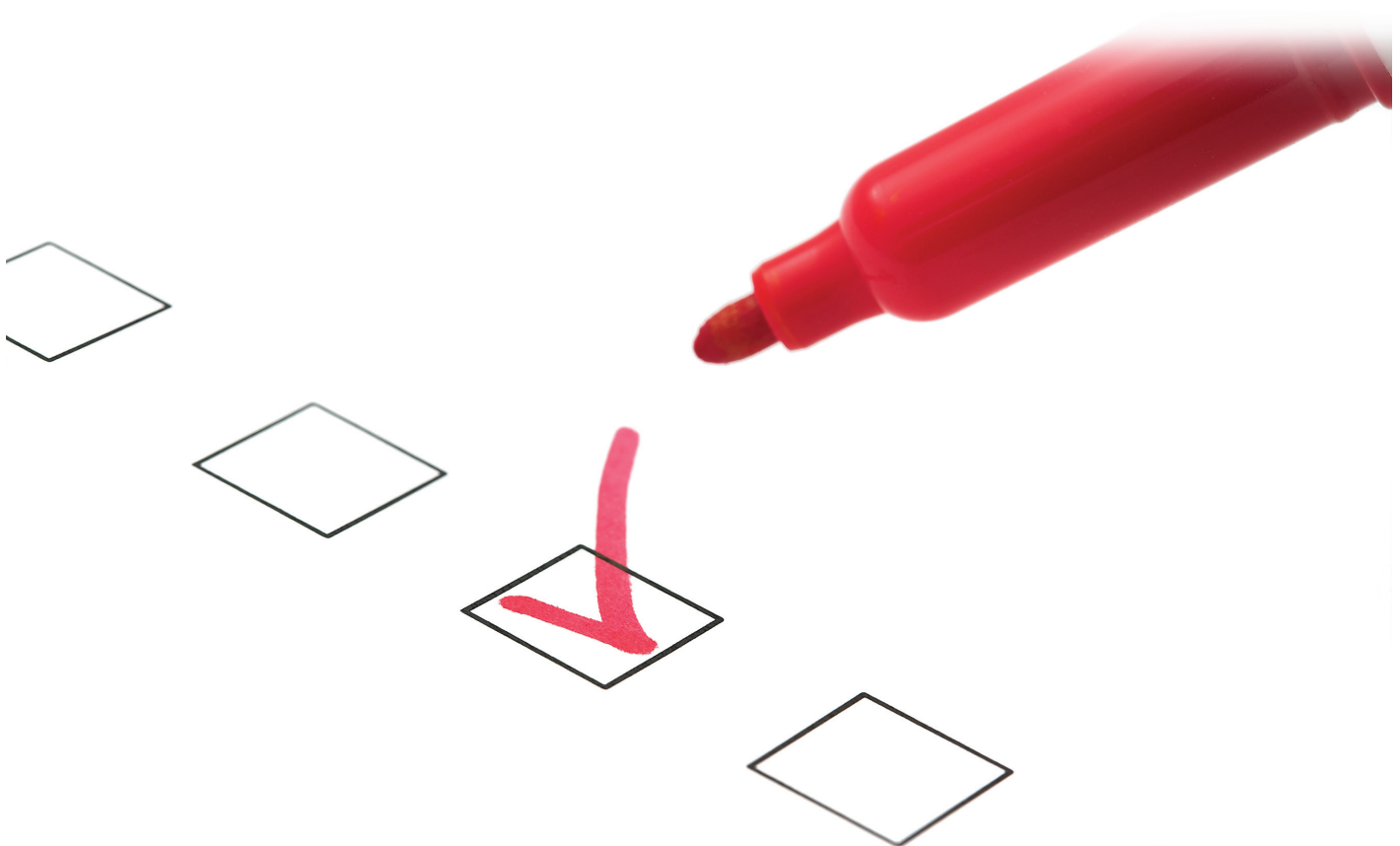
- a) What they believe the majority of their constituents favor
- b) What they personally believe is best for their constituents
- c) What their party leadership wants
- d) What special interests want
- e) Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. Please provide your occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Are you or a member of your household a member of any groups that engage in political activity, such as by lobbying the legislature, contributing to candidates, distributing information on issues and campaigns, or taking positions on issues? Please check all that apply.

- American Federation of State, Country, and Municipal Employees
- Communication Workers of America
- International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
- Medical Society of NJ
- NARAL Pro-Choice NJ
- United Brotherhood of Carpenters
- National Rifle Association
- National Federation of Independent Business
- NJ Association of Realtors
- NJ Builders Association
- NJ Coalition of Automotive Retailers
- NJ Chamber of Commerce
- NJ Education Association
- NJ Right to Life
- NJ Sierra Club
- NJ State Bar Association

Other: \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX D – Raw Numbers of Survey Responses by Party and District

Question 1	District 14 – R	District 14 – D	District 24 – R	District 24 - D	TOTAL
Q1	Yes – 263	Yes – 183	Yes – 155	Yes – 156	Yes – 757
	No – 5	No – 15	No - 10	No – 9	No - 39

Question 2	District 14 – R	District 14 – D	District 24 – R	District 24 - D	TOTAL
2a	63	38	38	6	145
2b	95	71	60	42	268
2c	168	118	44	121	451
2d	30	31	23	17	101
2e	21	20	13	18	72
2f	75	59	70	32	236
2g	4	1	4	2	11

Question 3	District 14 – R	District 14 – D	District 24 – R	District 24 - D	TOTAL
3a	78	85	72	71	306
3b	37	16	19	20	92
3c	46	36	19	28	129
3d	83	15	44	14	156
3e	8	14	0	9	31
3f	36	39	6	24	105
3g	21	14	12	12	59

Question 4	District 14 – R	District 14 – D	District 24 – R	District 24 - D	TOTAL
Q4	Yes – 131	Yes – 88	Yes – 95	Yes – 71	Yes – 385
	No – 135	No – 108	No – 67	No – 93	No – 403

Question 5	District 14 – R	District 14 – D	District 24 – R	District 24 - D	TOTAL
5a	122	81	77	20	300
5b	104	80	82	38	304
5c	58	40	24	83	205
5d	32	24	11	44	111
5e	6	12	8	11	37

26% of respondents listed only “Retired” as their occupation and have been excluded from these calculations. These individuals were once in the labor pool and would presumably have been distributed among the occupational categories in roughly similar proportions.



<b>Question 6</b>	<b>District 14 – R</b>	<b>District 14 – D</b>	<b>District 24 – R</b>	<b>District 24 - D</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Business	29	17	30	21	97
Clerical	8	4	1	4	17
Education	34	26	25	32	117
Finance	17	3	7	5	32
Government	6	1	4	1	12
Health Care	16	5	14	11	46
Homemaker	12	6	9	7	34
Law	5	9	5	5	24
Other	7	12	8	5	32
Public Service	6	7	5	6	24
Retired	88	69	26	27	210
Science	18	22	8	13	61
Self Employed	4	2	6	6	18
Service	2	0	2	2	6
Student	3	5	4	2	14
Trade	6	4	7	8	25
No Answer	7	7	5	10	29

<b>Question 7</b>	<b>District 14 – R</b>	<b>District 14 – D</b>	<b>District 24 – R</b>	<b>District 24 - D</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
7a	1	12	1	3	17
7b	14	10	5	4	33
7c	2	4	3	3	12
7d	3	0	2	1	6
7e	0	17	0	5	22
7f	1	0	2	1	4
7g	15	3	25	3	46
7h	1	0	6	0	7
7i	7	7	5	1	20
7j	2	0	0	0	2
7k	0	0	0	1	1
7l	3	3	4	1	11
7m	27	20	21	24	92
7n	9	0	16	1	26
7o	1	11	2	12	26
7p	2	4	5	4	15
7q	18	47	20	39	124

The complete database of survey responses is available to researchers upon request, please contact [lrenz@campaignfreedom.org](mailto:lrenz@campaignfreedom.org)

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