Title: How Money in Politics Affects the Issues You Care About

Subject: Money in Politics & Clean Elections

Type: Workshop

Goal: To build student interest and involvement in the issue of money in politics.

Objectives: Students will be able to:

* List some key facts about money in politics
* Understand how money in politics impacts issue they care about
* Discuss levels of political engagement among young people
* Explain how the clean elections system works
* Gain access to opportunities to affect change in the pro-democracy movement

Materials: Flip chart, sticky notes, markers, handouts

Time: 60 minutes

Procedure:

1. *Introductions (5 minutes)* – Send around a sign up sheet and go around the circle and have everyone introduce themselves by saying their name, year in school, and their answer to some type of fun question (favorite food, favorite band, etc.).
2. *Issue Brainstorm (10 minutes)* – hand out few sticky notes to everyone and have them write down some political issues they think are important and that are connected to certain policy areas (environment, health care, education, civil rights, and foreign policy). Have the participants place the sticky notes on the policy area flip charts (see Attachment A). Once they have placed their issues on the sheet, give them an opportunity to see what others have written. What seem to be some of the most popular issues? Why are these issues shared amongst a lot of people? Why are these even issues in the first place?
3. *Human Likert Scale I (5 minutes)* – having the participants respond to the following question by standing up and moving to one side of the room or the other - one side representing very high, the other side representing very low. They can also stand anywhere in between as well. How politically active and engaged do you think young people (15 – 25) are in America? Once the participants have situated themselves along the scale, ask some of them to elaborate on why they answered the way they did.
4. *Human Likert Scale II (5 minutes)* – how responsive is your government to your needs and the needs of your community (generation, neighborhood, etc.)? Follow the same procedure as step 3.
5. *Human Likert Scale III* (5 minutes) – how much influence does money have in our political system? Follow the same procedure as step 3.
6. *Discussion (10 minutes)* – draw everyone back to the issues they placed on the flip chart and explain how behind every issue lies a policy, behind every policy lies a group of politicians, behind every politician lies a campaign, and behind every campaign lies and exorbitant amount of private money. What are some examples of how the campaign contributions from certain industries and interests have influenced policy? Why would some politicians refer to this form of campaign financing as dangerous for democracy? Why would this form of campaign financing make a lot of voters feel cynical about our political process?
7. *Presentation + Discussion (10 minutes)* – show some key facts about money in politics that really highlight some of the fundamental concerns with private financing of campaigns (see Attachment C). After explaining each fact, ask the following questions: Why do so few people donate to political campaigns in amounts over $200? Why do incumbents have such a firm grip on power? Why is the need to raising money while in office a problem for both voters and politicians? Is too much money spent on political campaigns? Should we be spending more money on campaigns? How can we reform our political system so that all people can afford to run, afford to participate, and be represented in our democracy?
8. *Presentation II (5 minutes)* – explain the mission of your organization and how it involves people in addressing the issue of money in politics and other pro-democracy efforts.
9. *Presentation III (5 minutes)* – Handout Attachment B and discuss how the publicly financed Fair Elections work and how it has fundamentally changed the way voters and politicians interact with one another and how policies and laws are shaped in a democracy.

1. *Conclusion (5 minutes)* – how can people, particularly young people who are making their first entrance into our political system, help be part of this clean, fair, and voter-owned elections movement? Handout information for people to get involved with your organization.

**Attachment A**

ENVIRONMENT

EDUCATION

Automobile Industry

Oil and Gas Industry

Banking and Finance Industry

Wealthy Zip Codes

Coal Industry

Agribusiness

HEALTH CARE

FOREIGN POLICY

Wealthy Zip Codes

CIVIL RIGHTS

Oil and Gas Industry

Defense Industry

Health Insurance Industry

Food and Beverage Industry

Pharmaceutical

Industry

Large campaign donors

**Attachment B**

Fair Publicly Financed Election Campaigns

Our democracy is being undermined by the enormous amount of big money influencing out elections. But now there is a solution. Public financing of election campaigns are now in place throughout the United States They have passed in states (including Connecticut, Arizona, Maine, Hawaii), in cities (like Seattle WA, Washington DC, New York NY, Tucson AZ, Los Angeles CA, Bolder CO, Portland OR, Austin TX), and counties of Maryland (Prince George’s and Montgomery) and New York (Suffolk).

These fair elections give candidates the option to run with public financing for their campaigns. This frees them from dependence on big donors, gives voters more choice, creates a more diverse pool of candidates, and brings new ideas and policies into the public arena.

For information on how systems of public campaign financing work go to <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/public-financing-of-campaigns-overview.aspx>

**Attachment C**

**“Getting Elected in America”**

*How Money in Politics Affects Public Policy and Weakens the Ideals of Democracy*

**In order to make political decisions that shape public policy, politicians have to get elected**

* Most candidates have no other way of getting elected into *public* office besides raising and using *private* funds to finance their campaigns

**In order to get elected, politicians need to run competitive campaigns**

* Campaign staff, office space, advertisements, direct-mailing, travel, website, all cost money
* In over 80% of congressional races, the candidate who raises the most money wins the election

**In order to run competitive campaigns, politicians need to raise a lot of money**

* Candidates running for the presidency in 2008 will each have to raise at least $100 million in order to run a competitive race
* The average cost of a 2006 senate race was $7.8 million
* The average cost of running a senate race has quintupled since 1976

**In order to raise so much money, politicians need to get it from people who have a lot of it**

* Only 0.25 % of the population in America donates $200 or more to a political campaign
* People who donate more money to campaigns gain influence over politicians who are in office

**In order to get money from people who have it, politicians need to appeal to the needs and interests of those people**

* Politicians write and pass legislation that favor private/economic interests at the expense of the public good
* Conflicts of interest arise when politicians take money from the same industries and interests for which they write laws.

**MORE FACTS ABOUT MONEY IN POLITICS**

* Cynicism about politics and government is rampant as people see: a) the influence of big contributors on laws and policy and b) the corruption scandals involving campaign contributions.
* The cost of running for office continues to escalate. Few citizens can afford the huge cost of running for office at any level of government.
* Uncontested and non-competitive elections have increased in frequency, with a re-election rate of incumbents that tops 90% in both federal and state races. Incumbents regularly out-spend challengers by margins of 4 to 1.
* In 2010, the Supreme Court reversed a 100 year-old ban on corporate and union expenditures on political speech, unleashing unlimited spending from these sources. The “Citizen’s United” decision has worsened the dominance of corporate influence in our democracy.
* In 2014, the Court’s McCutcheon decision raised the limit of individual contributions to national party and federal candidate committees from a little over $200,000 to over $3 million (essentially no limit at all on what one person can contribute). The Supreme Court has declared war on campaign finance reform and exponentially raised the power of individuals and corporations to control our elections, laws and democracy.
* The number of bright young people who want to spend their lives in politics or government service has declined as the price of participation has risen.
* Fewer than 1% of Americans contribute the vast majority of private money going to fund campaigns.
* Too many politicians are forced to spend up to 20 hours a week raising money rather than solving our country’s pressing problems.
* National polling has consistently shown that large majorities of the American people distrust the government because they believe that wealthy special interests have more influence in Washington and in state capitols than do voters.
* Polls also showed that over 2/3 of voters say we need changes to the way elections are financed.

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*For more information please visit www.democracymatters.org*