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**To The Editor
The Oregonian
1320 SW Broadway
Portland, Oregon 97201**

To the Editor;

Your editorial "Portland's voter-owned repeal" (August 28) did us all a great service. You pointed out the fallacy of public financing of political campaigns and you gave us phone numbers so those, like me, could sign up in opposition.

Although the Portland City Council (minus one) has not identified where the money will come from we know with certainty it will come from us the taxpayers. And I find it chilling to think that Commissioner Erik Sten say the new system he sponsors will cost "almost nothing". Gosh, I sure would like "almost nothing" in my check book—say several hundred thousands of dollars!

To put it somewhat politely, it is a dumb idea; and, unfortunately, it is going to cost taxpayer dollars for an election to put it to sleep. Then they can put "almost nothing" into education, public safety, feeding the hungry and other programs yearning for help.

Sincerely,

Victor Atiyeh

August 30, 2005

Portland's voter-owned repeal

Finding voters who oppose the council's new system of taxpayer-funded political campaigns should be easy

AUG 28 2005
GOVERNMENT ATTACHE

This week marks the official start of Portland's new system to force taxpayers to pay for private political campaigns. Starting Thursday, aspiring candidates can formally register their intent to get on the city's public campaign dole.

This news would be depressing, were it not for the repeal petition filed with the city auditor's office. If petitioners gather enough signatures, Portland voters will get the chance in May to repeal this costly and unnecessary system.

Needless to say, we wish the signature gatherers well.

This spring, the Portland City Council voted 4-1 to approve public financing for political candidates. It was an odd decision for several reasons. First, the city can't afford it. Portland already faces a growing gap between the money it collects and the services it provides. Second, council members didn't find a new way to pay for their pet project. Their idea is to skim money from the general fund — away from police, parks, roads and neighborhoods.

Commissioner Erik Sten, who co-authored the plan with city Auditor Gary Blackmer, says the new system costs almost nothing. It's "less than two-tenths of one percent" of city funds, he likes to say, as if a million here and there isn't real money. Sten also says the change will pay for itself in better decision-making and fewer sweetheart deals with deep-pocketed donors.

That leads to the true fatal flaw of this system: Portland doesn't need it.

Mayoral candidate Jim Francesconi outspent his opponent Tom Potter 3-to-1 last year and had the backing of the business community. Voters chose Potter anyway. Over the years, Portland

voters have proven themselves unusually able to judge candidates by more than their war chests.

If anything, money makes Portland voters suspicious, not starry-eyed.

It's true that candidates spend too much time dialing for dollars. Portland's old election rules had room for improvement. But that room doesn't justify the unleashing of this hungry beast.

In a nutshell, candidates qualify for public funding by gathering signatures and \$5 checks from up to 1,500 people. Candidates for city council or auditor receive \$150,000 in the primary and \$200,000 in the general. Mayoral candidates get even more free money: \$200,000 in the primary and \$250,000 in the general.

All publicly financed candidates can receive *more* taxpayer money if they're forced to compete against someone who skips the program to raise a lot of money the old-fashioned way.

Under the council's plan, Portland residents don't get to vote on these changes until 2010.

This system is begging for repeal. Anyone who wants to get involved should call Portland Voters for Sensible Government at 503-552-5015 or the **First Things: First Committee at 503-552-5016.**

A majority of Portland voters already oppose public campaign financing, according to an independent poll conducted for The Oregonian earlier this year. That's good news. But poll numbers and philosophies aside, all Portland residents deserve a chance to vote on any dramatic overhaul of their election system.