



Legislator Occupations – Change or Status Quo After Tax-Funded Campaigns

By Matt Nese and Luke Wachob

Note: The following report is an updated version of an Issue Analysis originally published by the Center for Competitive Politics in April 2008. This version has been edited to include data from three additional legislative sessions in Arizona and Maine.

Issue

Proponents of tax-funded political campaigns, often called “clean elections” by their supporters, assert that these programs will produce more diverse legislative bodies by allowing a greater number of “non-traditional” candidates to run for and win elected office. They argue that replacing private, voluntary contributions to candidates with government grant money will “level the playing field” so that more “average citizens” can achieve public office.

For example, Public Citizen, an organization that favors taxpayer-financed political campaigns, argues that “ordinary citizens who want to serve in government don’t have access to money and are locked out of the system...”¹ Taxpayer-funded political campaigns are presented as a solution to this alleged problem by their advocates, such as Maine Citizens for Clean Elections, who believe these systems “encourage citizens from all walks of life to run for office...”²

If taxpayer-funded political campaigns do in fact reduce roadblocks for “ordinary” citizens running for office, we would expect to see changes in legislator occupations in the two states that have operated such systems since 2000, Arizona and Maine. In particular, we would expect to see a reduction in the percentage of legislators from the “tra-

ditional” backgrounds of law and business after the implementation of taxpayer-funded campaigns.³ This research examines legislator occupations in Arizona, from 1991 to 2013, and in Maine, from 1990 to 2012, in an effort to determine whether taxpayer-funded political campaigns have, in fact, decreased the number of legislators in law and business and increased the number of legislators from “non-traditional” backgrounds.

Analysis

An important consideration in this research is that state legislatures vary greatly in terms of compensation and time commitment. The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) designates three categories for state legislatures in terms of full and part time status. NCSL places Arizona in the “hybrid” category – that is, elected officials report spending “more than two-thirds of a full time job being legislators” for compensation that is “usually not enough to allow them to make a living without having other sources of income.”⁴ The annual salary of Arizona legislators in 2012 was \$24,000.⁵

3 Nationwide, the most common occupations among state legislators have been “Attorney,” “Full-Time Legislator,” and “Business Owner,” for at least the past three decades. Because Arizona and Maine have part-time Legislatures, we exclude “Full-Time Legislators” and define “traditional legislator occupations” in these states as “Business” or “Lawyer.” “Legislators’ Occupations in all States, 1976, 1986, 1993, 1995, 2007 (percentages),” National Conference of State Legislatures. Retrieved on July 1, 2013. Available at: <http://www.ncsl.org/legislatures-elections/legisdata/legislator-occupations-national-data.aspx> (2007).

4 “Full and Part-Time Legislatures,” National Conference of State Legislatures. Retrieved on July 1, 2013. Available at: <http://www.ncsl.org/legislatures-elections/legislatures/full-and-part-time-legislatures.aspx> (June 2009).

5 “2012 State Legislator Compensation and Per Diem Table,” National Conference of State Legislatures. Retrieved on July 1, 2013. Available at: <http://www.ncsl.org/legislatures-elections/legisdata/2012-ncsl->

1 “Citizen-Funded Elections,” Public Citizen. Retrieved on July 1, 2013. Available at: <http://www.citizen.org/Page.aspx?pid=1021> (2013).

2 “Statement of Mission and Values,” Maine Citizens for Clean Elections. Retrieved on July 1, 2013. Available at: <https://www.mainelections.org/mis-mission> (November 18, 2011).



Legislature Occupations in Arizona, 1991-2013⁸

Session/Occupation	40th (91-92)	41st (93-94)	42nd (95-96)	43rd (97-98)	44th (99-00)	45th (01-02)	46th (03-04)	47th (05-06)	48th (07-08)	49th (09-10)	50th (11-12)	51st (13-
Agriculture	10%	6%	6%	6%	6%	3%	4%	4%	4%	3%	2%	2%
Business	33%	38%	46%	40%	39%	39%	38%	45%	46%	39%	39%	41%
Education	19%	19%	14%	13%	13%	14%	7%	4%	3%	6%	11%	13%
Government	7%	5%	5%	8%	9%	8%	10%	9%	9%	11%	10%	9%
Health Care	7%	9%	7%	6%	4%	6%	9%	6%	4%	6%	3%	6%
Homemaker	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%
Lawyer	8%	11%	11%	12%	9%	6%	9%	12%	11%	11%	10%	7%
Non-Profit/Volunteer	3%	4%	5%	7%	10%	11%	9%	8%	10%	9%	10%	12%
Skilled Labor	7%	6%	4%	4%	6%	7%	10%	9%	7%	9%	3%	2%
Other/Retired	1%	0%	1%	2%	2%	4%	4%	3%	5%	5%	9%	6%

Maine is characterized as a state where “average lawmakers spend the equivalent of half of a full-time job doing legislative work” for pay that is “quite low and requires them to have other sources of income in order to make a living.”⁶ The annual salary of Maine legislators in 2012 was \$13,852 for the first regular session and \$9,661 for the second regular session.⁷

Both Maine and Arizona first implemented taxpayer-funded political campaigns in the 2000 election cycle. By examining trends in legislator occupations since 1991, we can determine whether these programs have had an impact on the diversity of legislator occupations.

Since the implementation of taxpayer-funded campaigns in 2000, Arizona’s Legislatures have seen notable declines in the number of lawmakers employed in agriculture or education. In the years before taxpayer-financed campaigns, an average of 7% of legislators reported an agricultural occupation; under taxpayer-funded campaigns, an average of only 3% of legislators worked in agriculture, a 4% decline. In the 44th Legislature, the last elected under traditional campaign financing, agriculture accounted for 6% of legislators’ occupations. That fell to 3% immediately after members were elected under a system of taxpayer-funded campaigns in 2001. As of 2013, only 2% of the current Arizona Legislature has an agricultural occupation.

legislator-compensation-data.aspx (2012).

6 *Ibid.* 4.

7 *Ibid.* 5.

8 Data was obtained from the Arizona House of Representatives (<http://www.azhouse.gov/>), the Arizona Senate (<http://www.azsenate.gov/senators.asp>), and the personal websites of legislators. Data is available upon request. Columns shaded in gray represent Legislatures that were elected under a system of voluntary campaign contributions. Columns shaded in blue represent Legislatures that were elected under taxpayer-funded campaigns.

The decline in lawmakers with a background in education has been even more dramatic. Under traditional campaign financing, an average of 16% of Arizona legislators had occupations in education. By contrast, under a system of taxpayer-funded campaigns, legislators with occupations in education have averaged only 8% of the Legislature, a drop of 8%.

However, some occupations have seen a notable increase over time. In particular, “Other/Retired” has grown from 1% on average under traditional campaign financing to 5% on average under taxpayer-funded campaigns. Legislators with occupations in government have increased slightly as well, from an average of 7% before 2000 to an average of 9% after.

Legislators with “Nonprofit/Volunteer” occupations have also grown since 1991; however, this occurred mostly under traditional campaign financing. From 1991 to 2000, the number of lawmakers from the “Nonprofit/Volunteer” category rose each year, from 3% in 1991 to 10% in 2000. Since then, the percentage of “Nonprofit/Volunteer” occupations in the Legislature has been relatively steady, fluctuating between a low point of 8% (2005-2006) and a high of 12% in the current Legislature. This trend – a steady increase before 2000 and stability after – suggests that taxpayer-funding of campaigns likely did not contribute to the rising number of legislators with “Nonprofit/Volunteer” occupations in Arizona.

Ultimately, little changed for the “traditional” legislator occupations of law and business in the years studied. Lawyers and businesspeople averaged 49% of the Legislature before 2000, and have averaged 50% since. Clearly, taxpayer-funding of campaigns has not decreased the prevalence of legislators with traditional backgrounds in Arizona.

Maine has experienced remarkable stability in its legislators’ occupations in the period studied. The

Legislature Occupations in Maine, 1990-2012⁹

Session/Occupation	115th (90-92)	116th (92-94)	117th (94-96)	118th (96-98)	119th (98-00)	120th (00-02)	121st (02-04)	122nd (04-06)	123rd (06-08)	124th (08-10)	125th (10-12)	126th (12-)
Agriculture	2%	3%	-	4%	1%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	3%
Business	27%	28%	-	21%	20%	22%	23%	21%	22%	23%	27%	26%
Education	15%	14%	-	19%	19%	19%	19%	23%	22%	17%	15%	13%
Government	10%	7%	-	4%	3%	2%	2%	3%	6%	9%	9%	9%
Health Care	4%	3%	-	4%	9%	9%	9%	10%	7%	6%	5%	8%
Homemaker	2%	2%	-	3%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Lawyer	8%	9%	-	6%	9%	9%	9%	10%	7%	10%	9%	8%
Non-Profit/Volunteer	4%	5%	-	3%	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	7%	8%	8%
Skilled Labor	11%	9%	-	9%	11%	7%	7%	8%	6%	8%	11%	8%
Other/Retired	17%	20%	-	27%	24%	28%	28%	24%	24%	18%	15%	19%

greatest change in any occupation since implementing taxpayer-funded campaigns was a 3% increase in lawmakers with backgrounds in health care. It should be noted that the number of health care workers in the Legislature was increasing prior to taxpayer-funded campaigns, rising from just 4% in 1990 to 9% in 2000. After implementing tax-financing, health care workers remained steady at 9% in 2000-2002 and 2002-2004. Currently, 8% of Maine legislators have occupations in health care. Therefore, taxpayer-funded campaigns do not appear to have contributed to the increase in legislators with health care backgrounds.

The only other average changes in Maine greater than 1% before and after “clean elections” were Homemakers (-2%) and Skilled Laborers (-2%). Looking at the “traditional” legislator occupations of law and business, we again find great stability. In the years studied before the implementation of taxpayer-funded campaigns, these occupations accounted for 32% of the Maine Legislature. In the years since, these occupations have continued to account for 32% of the Maine Legislature. In Maine, as in Arizona, taxpayer-funding of campaigns has not led to a decrease in the number of legislators from “traditional” backgrounds.

Conclusion

Our analysis highlights several key findings:

- 1) In both states, “traditional legislator occupations” of law and business either in-

creased (Arizona) or remained constant (Maine) under a system of taxpayer-funded campaigns.

- 2) In Arizona, the percentage of legislators in agriculture and education fell dramatically after taxpayer-financed campaigns were implemented.
- 3) Legislator occupation in Maine was notably stable in the years studied, both before and after the existence of taxpayer-funded campaigns.
- 4) The trends in legislator occupation for Arizona and Maine do not match.

These findings each point to the same conclusion: so-called “clean elections” systems do not increase the diversity of occupations in legislatures. Nor do these programs reduce the number of legislators elected from “traditional” backgrounds.

One possible explanation for this is that because most citizens require full-time incomes, and few occupations allow the flexibility needed in order to meet the demands of elected office, a disproportionate number of state legislators come from the worlds of law and business.¹⁰

Whatever the reason, the evidence from Arizona and Maine clearly illustrates that replacing private, voluntary contributions to candidates with government grant money for campaigns does not diminish the dominance of individuals from law and business professions within legislatures. Consequently, policymakers should not view taxpayer-funding of campaigns as a way of increasing diversity in state legislatures.

⁹ Data was obtained from the Maine House of Representatives (<http://www.maine.gov/legis/house/>), the Maine Senate (<http://www.maine.gov/legis/senate/>), and the personal websites of legislators. Data is available upon request. Columns shaded in gray represent Legislatures that were elected under a system of voluntary campaign contributions. Columns shaded in blue represent Legislatures that were elected under taxpayer-funded campaigns. Occupational data was unavailable for the 117th (1994-1996) Legislature.

¹⁰ Beth A. Rosenson, “The Impact of Ethics Laws on Legislative Recruitment and the Occupational Composition of State Legislatures,” *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 4. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/4148064?uid=3739584&uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&uid=3739256&sid=21102424207981> (December 2006), p. 623.



GUARANTEE *of* QUALITY SCHOLARSHIP

The Center for Competitive Politics is committed to delivering the highest quality and most reliable research on issues related to campaign finance, political speech, First Amendment rights, and related topics.

The Center guarantees that all original factual data are true and correct and that information attributed to other sources is accurately represented.

The Center encourages rigorous critique of its research. If the accuracy of any material fact or reference to an independent source is questioned and brought to the Center's attention with supporting evidence, the Center will respond in writing. If an error exists, it will be corrected in subsequent printings and distributions. This will constitute the complete and final remedy under this guarantee.



Published by the Center for Competitive Politics. All information is from sources considered reliable, but may be subject to inaccuracies, omissions, and modifications.

The Center for Competitive Politics (CCP) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Washington, DC. CCP's mission, through legal briefs, studies, historical and constitutional analyses, and media communication is to promote and defend citizens' first amendment political rights of speech, assembly, and petition, and to educate the public on the actual effects of money in politics and the benefits of a more free and competitive election and political process. Contributions to CCP are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

2013 Center for Competitive Politics

Material from this document may be copied and distributed with proper citation.

124 S. West Street Suite 201

Alexandria, Va 22314

(703) 894-6800

<http://www.CampaignFreedom.org>