

**COMMISSION TO STUDY THE FEASIBILITY OF PUBLIC FUNDING OF
STATE ELECTION CAMPAIGNS—CHAPTER 55, LAWS OF 2008**

PRESS RELEASE

“Commission on Public Campaign Funding Adopts Final Report”

Concord, NH. December 1, 2008:

The Commission to Study the Feasibility of Public Funding of State Election Campaigns, established by Chapter 55 of the laws of 2008, adopted its final report after receiving public comment on the draft report, at its final meeting in Concord today.

The Commission, charged with reviewing systems for public funding and determining whether there are sources of money available so such a system can work, has been working on the subject since August. The final report will be sent to Governor Lynch, Senate President Larsen, House Speaker Norelli, and the Clerks of the House and Senate, and filed at the State Library, as required by law. The report also will be posted on the Commission’s web site: www.nhPublicFundingCommission.com.

Commission members found, after study of the issue, that there are many benefits of public funding of state election campaigns that will add to the number of candidates running and the way campaigns are run and have recommended a system that brings those benefits to New Hampshire. Some of those benefits and key features of the recommendations are:

*Candidates electing public funding will need to work hard campaigning among and raising many small contributions from constituents they hope to represent—rather than spending their time raising funds in their districts and in other parts of the state or nation, from donors whose ties to the district candidates seek to represent are unclear.

*In Maine, where more than 80% of legislators have been elected via the public funding system, legislators overwhelmingly report feeling newly free to represent their constituents rather than groups that have contributed to their campaigns.

*The Commission’s suggested pilot program, if adopted, involving 6 state senate races over up to three election cycles, will test how public funding will work in New Hampshire.

*The approach recommended does not require any candidate to participate and places no restrictions on candidates who do not choose to participate—while it encourages increased participation by candidates and supporters.

Highlights of the report include a recommended public funding structure, considered by the Commission to comply with the requirements of constitutional law, an estimate of the cost of the system, designed to allow candidates opting to accept public funding adequate resources to conduct effective campaigns, and suggested revenue sources to pay for the system. The report also suggests a pilot system, should the legislature deem the full system unaffordable at this time. The report’s “summary of conclusions” is as follows:

“The Commission to Study the Feasibility of Public Funding of State Election Campaigns, established by Chapter 55 of the Laws of 2008, has met from August to November, performed its study, and submits this report, as required. Its conclusions, contained in the report, are summarized as follows:

*** Our study confirmed the members’ belief that a system of voluntary public funding of state election campaigns is in the best interest of New Hampshire.**

*** A constitutionally valid voluntary public funding system can be designed. As outlined in this report, it is a hybrid system containing a qualifying number of small individual contributions from New Hampshire residents with matching public funds for primary elections and grants of public funds for general elections. This system is consistent with New Hampshire political traditions of volunteer support and citizen involvement.**

***A full system, covering races for state senate, executive council and governor, will require approximately \$6.5 million per year.**

***The Commission has identified revenue sources that will provide up to \$5.585 million per year. The system is worthy of full funding and implementation, with the balance of funds provided from the General Fund.**

*** An interim Pilot Program involving six state senate elections over up to three election cycles could demonstrate the value of public funding, should full implementation not be possible at this time.**

*** Additional changes in the election system to make our elections less costly and more efficient, including the provision of on-line reporting and assistance to candidates, are desirable and should be implemented.**

*** Should New Hampshire establish a system of voluntary public funding for state elections, it will be the fourth state in the nation to do so.”**

Members of the Commission include two members appointed by Governor John Lynch, Attorney Martin Honigberg of Sulloway and Hollis, Concord, a former senior assistant attorney general; and Commission Chairman Attorney Bradford Cook of Sheehan Phinney Bass + Green, Manchester, a member of the State Ballot Law Commission; two members appointed by Senate President Sylvia Larsen, Stuart Comstock-Gay, Director of the Democracy Program at Demos: A Network of Ideas and Action, of Concord, and Abigail Abrash Walton, a faculty member in the Department of Environmental Studies and Director of the Advocacy Clinic and Assistant to the President at Antioch University New England, Keene; two members appointed by House Speaker Terie Norelli, John Rauh, President and Founder of Americans for Campaign Reform and former Democratic candidate for the U.S. Senate, New Castle, and Jim

Rubens, former GOP State Senator, Etna; and one member appointed by Secretary of State William Gardner, Citizen Activist Barbara Hilton, Portsmouth.

Mr. Cook can be reached at 603-627-8110 or at bcook@sheehan.com.