

DEMOCRACY MOVES FORWARD

Election reform measures passed by the NC legislature, 2007 session

Louise Romanow, 8/30/07

We managed to pass 4 campaign reform bills during the last legislative session, but it was *very tight and very late* with our biggest success, a pilot for public funding of council of state races. Other successes were Same Day Registration (SDR), a pilot for public funding of municipal elections, and a tweak of the public funding law for judicial races. Up for consideration was a bill for a legislative public funding pilot, but this will have to wait. An instant-runoff ballot will be piloted in Cary this fall.

Council of State Public Funding Pilot

HB 1517, *Voter Owned Elections Pilot*, passed its last hurdle, the NC Senate, on August 2, the last day of the session!! This bill creates a public financing option for 3 Council of State offices: Commissioner of Insurance, State Auditor, and Superintendent of Public Instruction. This program will go into effect in the 2008 election. The funding for this pilot comes directly from the state budget, as transparent as anyone would wish.

On the second reading (a bill is voted on 3 times before it passes a chamber) so many Senators rallied in defense of the bill that President *pro-tempore* Basnight changed his position and voted yes. Passage was difficult, and many thanks go to all the folks who encouraged their legislators to vote for this bill. See http://ncvce.org/index.php?page=HB1517_Summary for more information.

Same Day Registration

North Carolinians can now register **and** vote up to 3 days before an election, thanks to passage of House Bill 91, *Registration and Voting at One-stop Sites*. Although there were some amendments offered that required photo ID, this bill passed through the general assembly July 11 and was signed by the governor 9 days later *without picture ID requirements*. Previously one had to register at least 25 days before an election. Now, beginning with the elections this fall, voters can register and vote **ONLY** at early-voting sites for the October 9 and November 6 elections. Seven other states allow same day registration and voting on Election Day; NC does not.

Democracy North Carolina, a member of the North Carolina Voters for Clean Elections along with the League, said its research shows 1 million eligible citizens in the state are not registered to vote. Those between 18 to 25 make up nearly 400,000 of that group. This new legislation will encourage the vote by those who get interested in elections as they grow near. For more on SDR, see <http://www.democracy-nc.org/improving/fedapprv.shtml>

Chapel Hill: campaign public financing program for its local elections

The town of Chapel Hill became the first North Carolina municipality that is legally allowed to publicly finance local elections. HB 483, *Chapel Hill Campaign Finance Options*, passed in the Senate July 12 by a vote of 35-9. This bill authorizes Chapel Hill to institute a pilot public financing program for its 2009 and 2011 municipal elections. *More municipalities are wanted to try out this public-financing option. If your city is interested, please contact Bob Philips of Common Cause at nccef@bellsouth.net.*

Matching funds for issue ads by 527 groups in judicial races

Also, just in the nick, HB 1828, Strengthen Judicial Fund, passed the Senate August 1, and the governor signed it the next day. This legislation allows matching funds to be provided to judicial candidates who opt for public funding of their campaigns *when advertising against them is paid for by issue groups*, typically groups created under Federal Tax Code 527, which are not regulated by the Federal Election Commission. In the last election cycle Fairjudges.net sponsored advertising targeting specific judges that was *not* eligible for matching funds. HB 1828 provides for this contingency.

Instant Runoff Voting Improves Voter Turnout

An instant runoff voting pilot, based on HB 1024 from the 2005-6 legislative sessions, was approved for Cary's October election. The new ballot allows voters to cast subsequent votes - *counted in the event that no candidate wins a majority of the votes* - on a single ballot. LWV Wake had an active role in designing the new ballots. For more information see <http://www.wakegov.com/elections/2007instantrunoff.htm>.