



March 5, 2025

Honorable Jim Carlson
Chair, Elections Committee
Minnesota State Senate
beth.fraser@mnsenate.gov

Re: Statement in Support of Senate File 1996

Chair Carlson and Members of the Committee:

Clean Elections Minnesota (“CEM”) respectfully submits this statement in support of S.F. 1996, a bill relating to and updating campaign finance law in the State of Minnesota. CEM is a nonprofit-nonpartisan organization working to build a healthy and inclusive democracy by advocating for reforms that reduce the influence of big money and corporate special interests in our political system.

Public financing and limits on coordinated campaign practices are essential tools to ensure voting transparency and the viability of our democracy. As CEM has presented to this Committee previously, we believe that by assuring a level campaign playing field, through measures such as those addressed in S.F. 1996, put safeguards on the use of unlimited private money in elections, allowing for greater transparency while also allowing candidates to focus on their constituents, their voters and the issues that matter most in our communities rather than worry about the next sneak attack from opponents.

Updating Minnesota’s campaign finance program provides an opportunity to broaden public engagement in democracy and amplify the voices of ordinary Minnesotans in the electoral process. Modern campaign finance programs empower individuals to give well-informed support to candidates and give real meaning to voters’ ability to participate in the electoral process.

S.F. 1996 goes a long way to assure the transparency our voters and campaign supporters need in a viable democratic process.



To emphasize, in one day in January 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court unleashed a flood of money into our political system by ruling that, for the first time in our 250-year history, corporations (and therefore political action committees) have a constitutional right to free speech, and that spending unlimited money to promote or defeat candidates for office constitutes that speech. According to PublicCitizen.org, a consumer advocacy group, since that one day in 2010 money has flooded into elections, much of it so-called “dark money” through groups that refuse to disclose their donors.

Money may talk, but it must not be allowed to speak louder than a free press or the voice of the people. A clean election is financed in such a way that lack of wealth does not prevent qualified candidates from seeking and holding office. Excessive spending by special interests must not be allowed to overwhelm the flow of information to the public.

And coordinated campaign activity by dark-money groups intended to influence elections must be made transparent with disclosures such as those addressed in S.F. 1996.

There are two important points we would like the Committee to consider regarding campaign finance reform today.

1. There is too much high-powered money in American politics today, and much of it is nefarious

To quote from a pending Senate bill authored by Senator John Marty, “Supreme Court rulings that have equated money as speech have enabled . . . entities to spend virtually unlimited money in support of favored candidates and interests, undermining the core First Amendment value of open and robust debate in the political process and the opportunity for voters to hear speech from all candidates and all perspectives”¹

According to OpenSecrets, a nonpartisan, independent nonprofit, that tracks money in American politics, during 2022 national midterm elections fundraising skyrocketed to \$8.9 billion, then a new record.² Regardless of political affiliations, wealthy special interests look

¹ Senate File No. 569, A resolution memorializing Congress to overturn the United States Supreme Court decision Citizens United v. FEC.

² Outside Spending, www.opensecrets.org/outside-spending.



out for themselves, not everyday Americans. S.F. 1996 can reduce candidates' dependence on big money by making it, at least in part, more transparent.

Much of this money is used to support or defeat candidates for public office through so-called “independent” expenditures by groups seemingly unaffiliated with any candidate or campaign; but like the wink of an eye groups are not all that unaffiliated. We urge the Committee to support the provision of S.F. 1996 that close loopholes that allow for truly coordinated campaign activity by these moneyed sources.

2. Controls on big money in politics are popular among voters generally

Americans across the country and the political spectrum agree that the outsize influence of the wealthy few in our politics harms our democracy, and they demand change. A recent Pew study found that reducing the influence of money in politics is a top policy priority for a majority of Americans regardless of race, age, or political party affiliation.³ A 2019 Gallup poll found that only one in five Americans is satisfied with our campaign finance laws. These figures reveal a nationwide appetite for campaign finance reform.⁴ The campaign finance reform contained in S.F. 1996 directly addresses these concerns.

In conclusion, CEM submits that although even well-designed campaign finance programs cannot squeeze large-dollar private money out of politics, they can control disclosure of where this money comes from and how it's used. This gives candidates of all political affiliations, as well as voters and the public, the information they need and deserve to make well-founded decisions during the electoral process. This is a defense against the undue influence of megadonors. According to the Brennan Center for Justice this is one of the most powerful reforms available to counter the outsize influence in our democracy of the wealthy and corporations.⁵

Clean Elections Minnesota urges the Senate Elections Committee to vote to advance S.F. 1996.

³ Economy Remains the Public's Top Policy Priority; COVID-19 Concerns Decline Again, www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/02/06/economy-remains-the-publics-top-policy-priority-covid-19-concerns-decline-again/

⁴ Americans Most Satisfied with Nation's Military, Security; <https://news.gallup.com/poll/246254/americans-satisfied-nation-military-security.aspx>.

⁵ How to Counter Big Money in Politics, www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/how-counter-big-money-politics.



Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Fisher", written in a cursive style.

David Fisher

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