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# PUBLIC POLICY AND EDUCATION FUND OF NEW YORK

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**TO:** Interested Parties  
**From:** Richard Kirsch, Karen Scharff, Jessica Wisneski,  
**RE:** **Clean Elections poll – Zogby poll of likely voters in New York**  
**DT:** 4/28/08

**Summary:** Zogby International did a poll of 770 likely voters in New York in early April, commissioned by the Public Policy and Education Fund of New York. The poll asked New Yorkers about a specific proposal for public financing of election campaigns in New York (the proposal is known as Clean Elections; however the name was not used in the poll). The poll also asked about New Yorkers attitude toward state legislators. The questions in the poll were not “messed;” that is, the questions were either straight-forward descriptions of the public financing proposal or balanced arguments for and against the proposal.

The poll found very strong support for the public financing proposal, with 74% in favor, including 45% strongly in favor and 22% opposed (13% strongly). Upstate, suburban and independent voters were most supportive.

The poll presented three paired arguments against the proposal, all based on how the proposal would harm taxpayers and three arguments in favor of the proposal. The arguments voters heard against the proposal included:

- *Having taxpayers pay for political campaigns will only lead to higher taxes and force cutbacks in important programs like education and health care.*
- *Public financing is like welfare for politicians. Taxpayers shouldn't be paying for fringe candidates or negative campaign ads.*
- *Taxpayer financing of elections is a waste of our tax money and won't change anything in Albany.*

***When these arguments were paired with arguments for the proposal (see below) the arguments for the proposal prevailed by margins of 22% points to 34% points.***

After hearing the strong arguments for and against the proposal, the proposal picked up more support, with a final ballot of 79% supportive to 18% opposed.

## **Methodology**

Zogby International was commissioned by the Public Policy and Education Fund to conduct a telephone survey of likely voters from 4/4/08 to 4/6/08. The target sample is 770 interviews with approximately 55 questions asked.

**Narrative Summary**

1. Please tell us if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement: Legislators in New York right now are doing what is right for the residents.

Strongly agree	4%	<b>Agree</b>	37%
Somewhat agree	33		
Somewhat disagree	31	<b>Disagree</b>	59
Strongly disagree	28		
Not sure	5		

2. When it comes to making decisions in Albany, do you think that state legislators listen more to the concerns of voters in their districts or do you think they listen more to campaign contributors, do they try to listen to both, or do they not listen to either voters or lobbyists?

	%
They listen more to campaign contributors	58
They probably try to listen to both	26
They do not listen to voters or campaign contributors	10
They listen more to concerns of voters	4
Not sure	3

(Questions 3 through 5) I'm going to read some proposals that have been made for campaign finance reform. For each item I read, please tell me if you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the idea.

	Favor			Oppose			Not sure
	Strongly	Somewhat	Total	Somewhat	Strongly	Total	
Candidates agree to limit spending...	59	24	<b>83</b>	8	6	<b>14</b>	4
Candidates agree to limit the size of individual contributions they collect...	59	21	<b>80</b>	11	6	<b>17</b>	3
Each candidate receives a limited and equal amount of public funds...	56	17	<b>73</b>	10	14	<b>24</b>	4

6. Under a new proposal, New York State candidates would no longer raise money from private sources, other than contributions of \$5 to \$100 from NY voters. Instead, each candidate would receive a set amount of money from a publicly financed election fund. Spending by candidates would be limited to the amount they receive from the fund, and they would have to follow regular financial reporting requirements. Generally speaking, to you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose such a proposal?

Strongly favor	45%	<b>Favor</b>	74%
Somewhat favor	29		
Somewhat oppose	9	<b>Oppose</b>	22
Strongly oppose	13		
Not sure	3		

Group	Favor (Strongly)	Oppose (Strongly)	Advantage
Independents	80% (57%)	16% (10%)	+64%
Republicans	72% (40%)	27% (18%)	+45%
Democrats	73% (43%)	23% (12%)	+50%
Upstate	79% (45%)	18% (9%)	+61%
Suburban	76% (50%)	21% (13%)	+55%
New York City	67% (42%)	30% (18%)	+37%

7. How likely do you think it would be that a law, like the one previously described, would help make state legislators put voters concerns before those of lobbyists and campaign contributors?

Very likely	37%	<b>Likely</b>	74%
Somewhat likely	37		
Somewhat unlikely	8	<b>Unlikely</b>	24
Not at all likely	16		
Not sure	2		

8. If such a proposal were to become law, would it increase or decrease your trust in state legislators, or would it make no difference?

Increase	49%
Decrease	4
No difference	44
Not sure	3

Questions 9-11) Respondents were asked to choose the statement closest to their own opinion.

**9. Statement A:** *Having taxpayers pay for political campaigns will only lead to higher taxes and force cutbacks in important programs like education and health care.*

**Statement B:** *Under the current system, special interests that make campaign contributions get tax breaks and favors that cost consumers and ordinary taxpayers billions of dollars. Public funding of campaigns would save taxpayers money.*

Statement A	34%
Statement B	56
Not sure	11

Group	Statement A	Statement B	Statement Advantage B
Independents	32%	57%	+ 25%
Republicans	30%	55%	+ 25%
Democrats	37%	56%	+19%
Upstate	32%	58%	+26%
Suburbs	36%	52%	+16%
NYC	34%	58%	+24%

**10. Statement A:** *Special interests will always find a way to get their way with government. Taxpayer financing of elections is a waste of our tax money and won't change anything in Albany.*

**Statement B:** *Corporations give hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions to New York State legislators to block various forms of legislation. Public funding would allow legislators to be accountable to voters, not the big corporations.*

Statement A	30%
Statement B	65
Not sure	5

Group	Statement A	Statement B	Statement Advantage B
Independents	29%	64%	+ 35%
Republicans	34%	62%	+28%
Democrats	28%	67%	+39%
Upstate	30%	62%	+32%
Suburbs	31%	66%	+35%
NYC	29%	68%	+39%

11. **Statement A:** *Public financing is like welfare for politicians. Taxpayers shouldn't be paying for fringe candidates or negative campaign ads.*

**Statement B:** *Right now the only way to run for office is to become beholden to wealthy special interests or be rich so you can pay for your own campaign. This proposal will level the playing field so that average people can run for office and represent us, not the special interests.*

Statement A	30%
Statement B	64
Not sure	5

Group	Statement A	Statement B	Statement Advantage B
Independents	28%	66%	+38%
Republicans	34%	60%	+26%
Democrats	30%	66%	+36%
Upstate	30%	65%	+35%
Suburbs	27%	66%	+39%
NYC	35%	62%	+27%

12. *After hearing the arguments for and against the proposal to provide a fixed amount of public dollars to candidates who agree to limit campaign spending and collect contributions of only \$5 to \$100 from NY voters, and they would have to follow regular financial reporting requirements. Generally speaking, to you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose such a proposal?*

Strongly favor	41%	<b>Favor</b>	<b>79%</b>
Somewhat favor	38		
Somewhat oppose	8	<b>Oppose</b>	<b>18</b>
Strongly oppose	10		
Not sure	2		

After hearing the arguments for and against a proposal to provide a fixed amount of public funding to candidates, and to limit contributions to the \$5 to \$100 range, a strong majority (79%) say they would favor such legislation, with 41% of those individuals saying they would strongly favor such a plan. Overall 18% of respondents say they would oppose such campaign finance reforms, with 10% saying they are strongly opposed to the idea.