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Michigan's great opportunity for reform

Campaign finance reform efforts in Michigan received a major boost in late July when the Michigan Campaign Finance Network (MCFN) received word of approval about a \$325,000 grant from the Chicago-based Joyce Foundation.

"This grant will enable us to dramatically advance our public education and organizational efforts around the issue of money and politics in Michigan," said Johnston Mitchell, who is directing development of the MCFN.

The new Joyce Foundation grant will be for 16 months, beginning August 1, 2000. It provides the MCFN with the means to build a staff, establish a more formal infrastructure and expand its research and education effort.

Heading into the general election 2000, the MCFN has implemented its first comprehensive plan, with programs up and running in community organizing, coalition building, research, fundraising and media outreach. Representatives of MCFN member organizations are now taking the initial steps to formalize the MCFN structure and staff. The next meeting of the MCFN will take place on September 13.

"Michigan is ready for reform. John McCain's primary victory earlier this year was a clear sign that Michiganders of all political stripes are fed up with the state's business-as-usual campaign finance system," said Larry Hansen, Vice President of the Joyce Foundation. "I believe the Michigan Campaign Finance Network is now in a position to provide Michigan's growing campaign finance reform movement with the leadership, impetus, and coherence it needs. And that means advancing a policy agenda, making a persuasive case for change, educating and mobilizing citizens, creating a grassroots presence, and enlisting the support of elected officials, opinion-makers, and journalists to get the job finally done."

From August 1999 through July 2000, the Joyce Foundation provided a grant of \$126,500 to implement the MCFN's current plan.

In June of 1998, the Michigan Prospect for Renewed Citizenship received a \$19,000 grant from the Joyce Foundation to begin forming a coalition of organizations interested in advancing campaign finance reform in Michigan. This initial grant was used to lay the groundwork for building the MCFN.

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Greater Flint Hispanic Caucus endorses MCFN effort

On Saturday, June 10, 2000 the Greater Flint Hispanic Caucus endorsed the efforts of the Michigan Campaign Finance Network (MCFN).

The Greater Flint Hispanic Caucus is currently working with the MCFN's Voluntary Electronic Filing Project, targeting Flint-area state legislative candidates to use the MERTS Plus software provided for free by the Secretary of State's office.

The Greater Flint Hispanic Caucus will also be contacting the candidates that they endorse to urge them to follow clean campaign practices.

The chairman of the Greater Flint Hispanic Caucus is Lee Gonzales. Art Reyes, chairperson for their endorsement committee, is participating in the MCFN's community organizing effort for the greater Flint (Genesee County) area.

The Greater Flint Hispanic Caucus believes it represents a constituency that is underrepresented in government. While growing in numbers, Hispanics are not seeing an increase in their political access.

"As all emerging minority groups have experienced in the past, our lack of access to elected officials is due primarily to the current political system's heavy reliance on the moneyed few in this country," Reyes said. "We know that it will take a true grassroots political system to ensure true democratic representation of all this country's people. We feel the surest way to achieve this is through efforts like those being organized by the Michigan Campaign Finance Network."

To contact the Greater Flint Hispanic Caucus, send an e-mail message to: Lee Gonzales at: leegonzal@aol.com or Art Reyes at: areyesii@hotmail.com.

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The Fannie Lou Hamer Project and NAACP

Campaign finance reform as a civil rights issue was the focus of the Fannie Lou Hamer Project's presentation to the National Presidents Meeting at the 91st Annual NAACP Convention in Baltimore, July 8-13. Local, state and regional NAACP presidents participated in this meeting.

The Fannie Lou Hamer Project board of directors presented the NAACP with three actions for consideration during the next year:

- (1) Build support for campaign finance reform as a civil rights issue on the state and local institutional levels of the NAACP.
- (2) Participate in local and state campaign finance reform efforts
- (3) Continue to educate NAACP members on how money in politics impacts communities of color.

According to Stephanie Wilson, of Michigan Citizen Action, who is directing the Fannie Lou Hamer Project effort in the state, "A key goal is to involve local NAACP chapters around Michigan in the reform movement being lead by the Michigan Campaign Finance Network."

Wilson and Carey Whitfield of Battle Creek attended the NAACP convention in Baltimore.

A video - Campaign Finance Reform as a Civil Rights Issue - is available. It is based on the 1998 Howard University conference that spawned the Fannie Lou Hamer Project.

The Fannie Lou Hamer Project was founded in 1999. For more information about the Fannie Lou Hamer Project and its work with the NAACP in Michigan, please contact Stephanie Wilson at: tel. (616) 349-9170 or via e-mail at: stephny3@net-link.net.

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The color of money

The single highest contributing zip code area in the 1996 elections contributed 67 percent more than all 483 zip code areas in the U.S. in which people of color comprise 90 percent or more of the population. (Source: Public Campaign) People of color make up 28.7 percent of the U.S. population, but only 7.8 percent of the U.S. Congress. Currently, there is no Latino representation in the U.S. Senate. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau)

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AFL-CIO passes resolution on campaign finance reform

May 3, 2000, Milwaukee, WI

A Fair and Open System for Financing and Conducting Federal Elections

..."The health and integrity of our democracy depend, in large measure, on fair and open federal elections that command public confidence and encourage full citizen participation. Those goals are thwarted by our system of financing campaigns. We must fundamentally reform that system so that wealth no longer yields disproportionate influence. Citizens must be able to make their voices heard regardless of how much money they bring to bear on the process. The AFL-CIO believes that fundamental reform of our campaign finance system is necessary to eliminate unfair and undeserved financial advantage, protect constitutional freedoms, and encourage openness and integrity in political debate and contests. Reform must be comprehensive; piecemeal changes have simply prompted big money to find new outlets..." To view the complete resolution passed by the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO on the Internet, go to: www.aflcio.org/pub/estatements/may2000/fedelect.htm.

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The CLEAN candidate feeling

From the story, "Maine is Trying a Donation-Free Campaign," in the April 1, 2000 edition of The New York Times... "If I took \$250 from somebody, and I got elected," said Chester Chapman of Porter, "and then they said, 'I want you to vote this way on a particular issue,' well, then, I've got to weigh what they want, what the people of my district want, plus what my own conscience tells me. That's three things I've got to weigh. By doing it this way (participating as a 'clean' candidate), that eliminates one of them..." Individual contributions to candidates not running under Maine's clean elections law can not exceed \$250. For a copy of this article, please contact MCFN.

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A nationwide campaign finance reform update

The year 2000 holds great promise for real campaign finance reform at the state level across the country.

Maine is implementing its new Clean Elections law this year. Of the 374 state legislative candidates running in Maine this year, 115 opted to run as "clean" candidates and only accept public funding provided by the state. The other candidates will continue to raise private money to finance their campaigns. Of the 115, 32 percent were incumbents versus 37 percent of all candidates. Maine voters passed a referendum called "The Clean Elections Act" in 1996.

Vermont - A leading advocate for Clean Money legislation in the state has gathered the required 1,500 signatures to qualify him for public funds to run his campaign for governor. This is the first time anyone in the country has demonstrated the statewide support needed to qualify as a gubernatorial Clean Money candidate.

Missouri - In the Show-Me state, 108,000 signatures have been turned in an attempt to put their Clean Money initiative on the ballot this November. In Oregon more than 101,000 signatures were gathered, with 76,472 signatures being valid, to officially qualify their Clean Money question for the ballot in November.

Connecticut - After a fundraising scandal involving a former state treasurer, the state legislature has passed a Clean Elections bill which should become law.

Arizona - The state Supreme Court has ruled that the Arizona Clean Elections Act is constitutional. The court severed the appointment process of the Clean Elections Commission but ruled that the present Commission can continue to serve. Arizona voters passed a Clean Elections referendum in 1998.

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Michigan Campaign Finance Network gets strategic support from Massachusetts

The Michigan Campaign Finance Network (MCFN) has been receiving some valuable assistance over the past couple of months from David Donnelly, Executive Director for Massachusetts Voters for Clean Elections.

Donnelly has been offering strategic ideas to the MCFN about building an organizational structure and formulating its long term strategic plan. "The Midwest will be a real battleground for reform and a place to have a foothold from a national perspective," said Donnelly. "Michigan must lay a strong foundation now if it is going to succeed in its effort for real campaign finance reform."

"The overwhelming victories of Maine and Massachusetts were the result of eight to 10 years of hard work," continued Donnelly. "We did broad-based coalition building; in-depth research and analysis of both the problem and potential solutions; and we organized an independent activist base before we even thought about moving ahead to the ballot. There really are no shortcuts to victory, but victory is sweet."

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