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**Vote “Yes” on Proposition 15, the California Fair Elections Act**

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In June, California voters will have a rare chance to get money out of politics by voting “Yes” on Proposition 15, the California Fair Elections Act.

California voters have been asked to vote for campaign finance reform many times over the last twenty years, and consistently voters have strongly supported these efforts to level the playing field between citizens and special interests. Unfortunately, time after time, these reform efforts have been struck down or watered down by the courts. Most recently, the US Supreme Court on a 5-4 vote gutted generations-old prohibitions on corporate financing of campaigns and key provisions of the McCain-Feingold Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act.

California elections have been getting costlier as special interest spending increases. Since 2000, over \$1-billion has been raised by California politicians, and a candidate for Governor is currently spending over \$350,000 per day. Elected state officials must be on a near constant quest for campaign contributions, diverting them from their jobs and potentially swaying their perspectives. With the crisis in Sacramento, we need state officials focused on their jobs and not on fundraising

With contribution and spending caps becoming increasingly off limits through the courts, and with special interests’ ceaseless efforts to evade the remaining restrictions with ever more creative “independent expenditures,” “member communications,” “soft money,” and other such subterfuges, there remains only one clear path to leveling the political playing field. If special interest spending can’t be brought down, then public elections spending must even the score. Proposition 15 brings needed public campaign financing to California.

Public campaign financing is now working in seven states. In Arizona, Governor Janet Napolitano (D) was the first governor elected with public financing, and current Governor Brewer (R) was also elected with public financing. In Maine, 85% of State legislators were elected with public financing, eliminating any campaign fundraising.

Candidates that don’t need to raise special interest donations are free to speak their minds, and these candidates answer only to the voters. Public financing has been shown to increase voter participation, as voters see that candidates address voters’ needs, not special interests. Candidates do not have to be independently wealthy or

rely on large donors to win elections. Public financing has brought in different candidates with fresh perspectives who aren't tied to established interests. After the election, publicly financed candidates don't have to spend their time constantly raising money for the next election, nor be concerned about offending contributors.

Public campaign financing of state elections in California faces the challenges of the large amount of money needed to run a competitive campaign and the prospect of fringe candidates seeking funding. The California Fair Elections Act addresses these issues.

Proposition 15 would implement voluntary public financing for the Secretary of State election for years 2014 and 2018 to demonstrate public campaign financing in California. The funding would not come from taxes, but instead primarily from increasing the registration fee for State lobbyists from \$12.50 per year (one of the lowest in the nation) to \$350/year.

Candidates who choose to accept public financing could not also raise or spend other money. To qualify for funding, major party candidates must first obtain 7,500 five-dollar contributions from registered voters, while obtaining full funding for independent or third-party candidates requires 15,000 such contributions. Proposition 15 includes tough restrictions on mispending money, and violators could face large fines, jail sentences, and a ban on running for office or receiving state contracts.

Voter approval of Proposition 15 will demonstrate effective public campaign financing in California, and lobbyist registration fees are an appropriate funding source for ensuring a level playing field in elections. Voting "Yes" on Proposition 15 will be a critical step in shifting democracy back to the people. For more information, see [www.YesOnProp15.org](http://www.YesOnProp15.org).