



# Texans Against Big Money!

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## Citizen Groups & Legislators Push Bills to Limit Big Money in Texas Politics

### Three Key Reform Bills Get House Hearings on Wednesday

Austin, TX: Texas citizen and government reform organizations today praised the House Elections Committee for scheduling hearings on three bipartisan campaign reform bills to clean up Texas politics. The bills will limit the influence of large campaign contributions and unreported political spending by corporations. The reform bills are among the groups' top legislative priorities to limit big money in Texas politics.

The citizen groups were joined by the reform bills' sponsors in calling on the House Elections Committee to send the measures to the House floor. The bills and their sponsors are:

- **HB 110, The Campaign Fairness Act** by Rep. Mark Strama: Places limits on the amounts that individuals and political committees can contribute to candidates. The limits range from \$2,000 for statewide candidates to \$500 for state representative candidates per election. The bill also creates a voluntary system of spending limits.
- **HB 111, The Clean Elections Act** by Rep. Mike Villarreal: Places a limit of \$100,000 on the total amount that an individual can contribute in a 2-year election cycle to all candidates for state office, state political committees and political party committees.
- **HB 1085** by Rep. Todd Smith: Strengthens the 100-year-old prohibition on corporate campaign spending by prohibiting so-called "issue ads" paid for by undisclosed corporate sources that are designed to impact the outcome of an election.

"We need a government that listens to all citizens and gives all proposals a fair hearing. Unfortunately, large campaign contributions have tilted the playing field in Austin," explained Representative Mike Villarreal. "By limiting donations from mega-donors, my bill takes an important step towards leveling the legislative playing field."

"The extraordinary contributions from Texas' wealthy mega-donors provide them with a disproportionate influence in the political process. In fact, mega-donors have, at times, single handedly financed a single candidate's campaign.," said Representative Mark Strama.

"A disclosure system is a farce when it requires a Sunday School teacher to disclose a \$50 contribution yet allows unlimited and undisclosed union and corporate contributions. We must do better," said Representative Todd Smith.

The citizen groups participating in the Texans Against Big Money campaign believe contribution limits are a necessary step in reforming the Texas political system, which is dominated by a handful of wealthy mega-donors and interest groups. Texas is one of just a handful of states that place no limits on the size of political contributions. In the recent 2006 elections 140 wealthy mega-donors who contributed more than \$100,000 each delivered \$51 million in political contributions accounting for nearly 30 percent of the total contributions from all Texans.

“We need to put the brakes on pay-to-play politics in Texas,” said Craig McDonald, director of Texans for Public Justice. “Big political money pays for pollution, it pays for higher electric rates, it pays for privatization. Big money is constantly picking our pockets while lining its own. In the free market of Texas politics, you get as much representation as you can afford. Its time to limit this accepted form of corruption.”

“The integrity of Texas’ political institutions has taken a beating lately. Our elected representatives need to make political reform a priority. Limiting the undue influence of big money isn’t a Republican issue and it isn’t a Democratic issue; it is an issue that affects all Texans regardless of any political affiliations they might hold,” said John Courage, chair of True Courage Action Network. “Democracy can’t work if citizens have no faith in the integrity of its political institutions.”

“Political reform is not a partisan issue,” said Darlene Hicks, President of the League of Women Voters of Texas, one of the organizations supporting the call for limits. “Campaign limits are fair and necessary. These reforms benefit all the citizens of Texas regardless of their political persuasion.”

“You only need to read recent headlines to know that we need strict contribution limits to put an end to democracy-warping, big-dollar contributors,” said Mario Perez, State Chairman of Common Cause Texas. “When big money sets the agenda millions of Texas voters are left out of the process and denied equal influence over the laws and regulations that come out of Austin.”

Organizations participating in Texans Against Big Money include Campaigns for People, Common Cause Texas, Don’t Mess with Ethics, Faith in Texas Fund, Gray Panthers, Homeowners Against Deficient Dwellings, Homeowners for Better Building, Independent Texans, Latinos for Texas, League of Women Voters of Texas, Public Citizen, San Antonio Area Progressive Action Coalition (SAAPAC), Texans for Public Justice, Texas Environmental Democrats, Texas Impact, Texas Public Interest Research Group (TexPIRG), and True Courage Action Network (TCAN).

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