

IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 27, 2005

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Watson Coleman Designates 6th District For 'Fair & Clean' Election Program

Trenton - Assemblywoman Bonnie Watson Coleman, Chairwoman of the Democratic State Committee, announced on Monday the designation of the 6th Legislative District as one of the two "Clean and Fair Elections" districts for this year's Assembly contests.

"By reducing the role of money, we are taking another step to increase public confidence in the election process," stated Assemblywoman Watson Coleman. "The low-dollar contribution limits will help get more people of modest means involved in the political process."

Both Assemblyman Louis Greenwald and his running mate, Pamela Rosen Lampitt, have publicly expressed a willingness to participate in the pilot program. New Jersey is the first state to enact clean elections by an act of the Legislature. New Jersey is the third state to provide for publicly financed legislative elections, joining Arizona and Maine.

Each team of candidates will be required to generate \$5 contributions from at least 1,000 donors and \$30 contributions from at least 500 donors. After crossing the \$20,000 threshold, each ticket would qualify for public funds and would forego any further fundraising.

"Public financing will lead to a greater emphasis on the issues," said Assemblywoman Watson Coleman. "This is an opportunity for candidates from both parties to show that positive campaigns will resonate with the voters."

The 6th District has the 2nd highest number of registered voters - 134,569 - 55 percent of whom are unaffiliated with either political party. It has also been a competitive district, with both Assembly seats held by Republicans until 1996, when one was taken by a Democrat followed two years later by another Democratic victory.



TOM WILSON
CHAIRMAN

June 27, 2005

The Honorable Bill Schluter
Chairman, NJ Citizens' Clean Elections Commission
State House Annex
PO Box 68
Trenton, NJ 08625-0068

VIA FACSIMILE

Dear Chairman Schluter:

Thank you for your letter of June 24, 2005. Given your long and distinguished history on the subject of campaign reform, I respect and appreciate your thoughts. I am pleased to know that you recognize the serious and significant shortcomings of the law enabling the "Clean Elections" pilot program.

While the concept behind this law has merit, I am afraid that after a careful and thorough review I am left with no choice but to conclude that the law codifying this concept is fatally flawed and destined to fail on several fronts. While I appreciate your course that this is "a pilot project," the stakes, not only in terms of the outcome for the candidates and voters, but also for the cause of campaign reform itself, are just too high to permit the pilot project to be carried out under anything less than optimal conditions. Given our conversation and your letter, you clearly recognize that the current law is nowhere close to optimal. No Republicans were invited to participate in the crafting of this bill and Republican-sponsored amendments (A-3649, Corodemus / Kean) designed to address many of the shortcomings that have been identified (many by you and the Commission) are being ignored even today. As you well know, campaign reform must be a bipartisan endeavor. The Democrat Majority is not interested in real reform, only window dressing that meets their narrow political agenda. That is truly unfortunate.

The law and proposed regulations are flawed on two major accounts.

First, the barriers to entry are simply too high. One of the stated purposes of the law is to lessen the degree to which candidates must spend time fundraising. Each candidate, however, is required to raise 1500 contributions in approximately 60 days - 25 contributions per day. I suspect that a review of ELEC records demonstrates that few candidates enjoy that sort of success. Moreover, the record-keeping requirements and paltry sum permitted for the purpose of obtaining those 1500 contributions are just plain inadequate. So, instead of having candidates discuss issues and focus on communicating with the thousands and thousands of voters in their district, they will spend the summer filling out forms and soliciting 1000 \$5 checks and 500 \$30 checks.

Hon. Bill Schluter
Page 2

Second, and most troubling to me, though, is the exposure that a participating candidate has to third party attacks and the lack of adequate disincentives and penalties for non-candidates for non-compliance. The Act and the proposed regulations fail to address in any meaningful or substantive way the independent, third-party expenditures that have become a common feature of campaigns conducted in Arizona and Maine, the two states you noted that have established public-funding programs.

Under the scheme enacted in New Jersey, a third party could expend hundreds of thousands of dollars on behalf of candidates participating in this pilot program. Should that occur, the offended candidates will be entitled to a comparative drop in the financial bucket - \$50,000.

The specter of this occurring is made even more real (and, frankly, offensive) when you consider that State Party Committees, County Party Committees, Municipal Party Committees, Legislative Leadership Committees, and every other 527 are considered third parties and are able to make independent expenditures. Unlike the Governor's Public Financing Law, this law does nothing to prevent the wheeling of money from those sources into a chosen district by severely and expressly limiting independent expenditures by party organizations and leadership committees.

Given the long and well documented history of the New Jersey Democrats, and their current leader Jon Corzine, wheeling money from county to county to suit their political purposes, I am sure you will forgive me for feeling less than confident in trusting that this will not occur again this year.

Neither the law nor the proposed regulations impose any additional reporting standards on an entity making an independent expenditure thus denying the offended candidates the ability to promptly access even the modest sums to which they are entitled. The nature of political campaigns require the ability to react rapidly. We know from research that voters are more likely focus on elections in the days before an election. How will a candidate who is the subject of a \$250,000 independent expenditure launched 7 days before the election ever going to have the time (let alone the resources) to respond effectively? The answer is they won't.

Chairman, I wish I could enthusiastically and energetically support this pilot program. I wish that it was a sincere and earnest attempt to reduce the impact of money in campaigns. I wish that candidates could participate knowing that they would not be subject to an eleventh-hour negative media blitz funded by a party organization or 527. I wish that those who crafted the legislation wanted real reform, not just a line to be used on a campaign mailer. Sadly, I find myself concurring with the *Asbury Park Press*, who editorialized just today that "Clean Elections" needs scrubbing."

Hon. Bill Schluter
Page 3

Having said all of this, I believe that we do not give hope a chance by abandoning it. With great reservations and with ample warning to those entrusted to implement the law and to the candidates subject to this risky and poorly designed experiment, I hereby notify you that I designate the Thirteenth legislative district for inclusion in the pilot program.

I look forward to your continued advocacy for campaign reform and to your vigilance in monitoring this pilot program. I strongly encourage you to adopt regulations which close many of the loopholes presented to your committee by Mark Sheridan, Counsel to the NJGOP.

Sincerely,



Tom Wilson
Chairman

c: Hon. Alex DeCroce
Hon. Sam Thompson
Hon. Amy Handlin
Dr. Frederick M. Herrmann, ELEC