

House Bill 42

News Reports, Articles, Etc.

Leg Study Group:
Online Campaign Reporting

ADN Compass by Rep. Bob Lynn, 01/11/09

Online campaign reporting offers instant exposure**COMPASS: Other points of view**

By REP. BOB LYNN

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It's past time to bring political campaign disclosure into the 21st century. Instant transparency is needed. That's why I'll be filing legislation in January to establish an On-Line Campaign Banking and Reporting System that will make campaign contributions and expenditures visible to the world in real time.

The current system presents campaign finance snapshots, accurate only for the dates of the reports. This invites "game playing" by allowing candidates to "hide" information from opponents and the public for as long as possible.

Large contributions from controversial people or Political Action Committees can be deposited after a report due date to delay political repercussions. Likewise, candidates can delay large media buys until after a report due date, thereby keeping opponents in the dark about an oncoming television onslaught. Another tactic employed by some candidates is to scribble campaign reports, and mail them to the state before midnight on the due date. The report to the state would be "on time," but late for transcription to the Internet for the general public.

Campaign reporting games can affect the outcome of elections. Such games can significantly hinder Alaskans from getting the campaign transparency they deserve in a timely manner -- which is the purpose of campaign disclosures. The advent of "early voting" makes this especially important.

The current problem is fixable. I'm filing legislation for an Internet online campaign reporting system similar to the personal online banking systems we use in our private lives.

With campaign online banking, anyone in the world could see campaign disclosure on the Internet, without a password. Campaign contributions would show up on the Internet immediately when deposited. Campaign expenditures (say for signs) would be displayed on the Internet as soon as campaign checks are cashed. Campaign account balances would be up-to-date instantly for the world to see.

This system would benefit everybody involved in the campaign process, from voters to candidates to state agencies.

There are several ways to implement online campaign banking. There could be a bid from Alaska banks to perform the service for a fee to be paid by the state, or by the candidate, or shared between a candidate and the state.

Or an arrangement could be made for needed software to be made available to an Alaska bank of the candidate's choosing. Banks already do online banking, so this shouldn't be a major problem.

Likewise online reporting will need to display names, addresses, and occupations of campaign contributors, and recipients of campaign expenditures. If computer gurus can develop software that guides objects to distant planets, they can figure out how to do this. If there's a will, there's a way.

Our Legislative Research people tell me Alaska would be first in the nation to adopt instant reporting. Transparency through campaign disclosure is good. Instant transparency through online reporting is better. Let's lead the way!

Bob Lynn is a Republican state representative from Anchorage.