

EMPOWER Act of 2019

The presidential public financing system is one of the country's most significant post-Watergate campaign finance reforms. It offers public matching funds to presidential primary candidates who demonstrate their viability by raising small contributions and, in exchange, abide by voluntary limits on campaign spending. It also offers a grant of public funds to presidential general election candidates who agree to forego private fundraising. Public financing has helped level the playing field for lesser-known presidential candidates, funding almost every presidential campaign for more than two decades after its enactment.

Unfortunately, in today's world of unlimited contributions from corporations and individuals through super PACs, it is no longer feasible for presidential candidates to participate in the presidential public financing system as it currently stands. The Citizens United decision and related court cases have led to not only massive increases in campaign fundraising but a larger share of those funds coming from special interest groups who now wield an outsized influence on our political process.

The EMPOWER Act would modernize the presidential public financing system and bring back a competitive public funding option for presidential candidates that encourages public participation and incentivizes candidates to be responsive to every American instead of wealthy hidden campaign donors.

Core Provisions of the Empowering Mass Participation to Offset the Wealthy's Electoral Role (EMPOWER) Act

- **Eliminates spending limits on participating candidates:** Candidate spending limits are no longer viable in the wake of Citizens United since outside groups can now make unlimited expenditures funded by unlimited contributions to oppose candidates. There would be a limit on the total amount of matching contributions available to a presidential candidate, to avoid draining public funds.

- **Increases the amount of matching funds for participating candidates:** The first \$200 of contributions by individuals to presidential candidates would be matched with public funds at a 6:1 ratio, increased from the current 1:1 match for the first \$250. For example, a candidate participating in the system would receive \$1,200 in public funds for a \$200 contribution, and would end up with a total of \$1,400. This would provide important new incentives for citizens to give and for candidates to seek small donations from supporters.

- **Requires participating candidates to agree to accept contributions of no more than \$1,000:** The current individual contribution limit of \$2,800 per donor, per election, would be reduced to \$1,000 per donor, per election, for candidates who participate in the system. The present contribution limit would remain unchanged for candidates who do not participate in the system.

- **Empowers national parties to compete alongside Super PAC dollars:** In order to allow candidates to respond to a deluge of Super PAC dollars, national parties could make \$100,000,000 in expenditures in coordination with their general election presidential candidates participating in the system.