

TESTIMONY
HB 110
House Elections Committee
April 18, 2007

The League of Women Voters of Texas (LWV-TX) supports **HB 110** filed by Rep. Mark Strama and co-sponsored by Rep. Elliott Naishtat. The bill is referred to as the TEXAS CAMPAIGN FAIRNESS ACT. Like other measures that have been introduced in the Legislature in past sessions and this session, the bill would place reasonable contribution limits on statewide offices including the executive branch, state senator, state representative, or member of the State Board of Education. The limits would be span an election cycle. Currently, the only contribution limits in Texas are for judicial candidates.

Thirty-seven states place limits on individual contributions according to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). As far back as 1970, there was public concern that the increasing cost of campaigns could lead to corruption when money and politics are combined. When single individuals can contribute millions of dollars to chosen candidates, it leads to the perception that the ordinary citizen does not have access to a fair election; that special interest money can be tied to legislation that may not be in the public interest. In 2005, 84 bipartisan legislators co-sponsored **HB 1348** that attempted to reform the way elections were financed. It did not make it. With that kind of support, let this be the time to make it happen.

One problem that can occur with limited contributions is that of bundling. While it may not be possible to completely eradicate this practice, the bill does require that the person who receives a contribution return the excess money within the stated time period. Also, contributions from children over 18 are considered individuals, so the young children cannot be bundled with adults. Violators would face civil penalties.

Contributing to candidates of one's choice is not undesirable. What is undesirable is when a handful of people who have the means can control the election of candidates that shuts out the average voter. This is not democracy. LWV-TX is concerned that public confidence has eroded in the electoral process on all three levels of government. Limiting the amount of contributions to candidates could be a challenge to look for alternative sources of financing campaigns. Encouragement to look for smaller and more individual contributions could overcome the power of the PACs, dilute the impact of corporations and unions and make our elections the model it should be for the world. The League will continue to work toward that end.

Please vote favorably for **HB 110**. Thank you.