Washington, D.C. - U.S. Representatives David Price (D-NC) and Christopher Shays (R-CT) and U.S. Senators Russ Feingold (D-WI) and Susan Collins (R-ME) have introduced legislation to repair and strengthen the presidential public financing system

(Price's remarks during a press conference today are included below).

The Presidential Funding Act of 2007 addresses problems that have developed in the system, which was put in place following the Watergate scandal. The presidential public funding system is intended to protect the integrity of the electoral process by allowing presidential candidates to run competitive campaigns without becoming overly dependent on private donors. Also cosponsoring the legislation in the Senate are Joe Biden (D-DE), Hillary Clinton (D-NY), Chris Dodd (D-CT), Richard Durbin (D-IL), John Kerry (D-MA), and Barack Obama (D-IL). Other House cosponsors include Representatives Rahm Emmanuel (D-IL), Mike Castle (R-DE), Todd Platts (R-PA), and Chris Van Hollen (D-MD).

"Neither party is immune from the current fundraising arms race, which is why we need a bipartisan solution that will return the system to sanity," Price said. "The voters win when all candidates can spend more time talking to the American people than raising money."

"The Presidential public financing system is worth preserving and improving," stated Shays. "Several factors -- including the front-loading of the primary process, the emergence of extremely wealthy candidates and the unpopularity of the tax check-off -- have combined to render the system of presidential public financing in serious need of repair. I am grateful for this bipartisan, bicameral legislation which makes several changes to the presidential public financing system to make the public financing system more attractive to candidates and more fair for those who choose to participate."

"In the two decades since Watergate, public financing made presidential elections more competitive and reduced the appearance of corruption that accompanies a wide-open money chase," Feingold said. "But the system clearly needs to be updated to increase voter confidence in the electoral process by making the candidates less dependent on wealthy contributors."

"Current estimates are that the 2008 contest for the presidency of the United States will cost more than one billion dollars. As a result of these skyrocketing costs, candidates are going to be spending more time holding exclusive, high-dollar fund-raisers than meeting the voters and discussing the issues. Clearly, the system is flawed. The Presidential Funding Act of 2007 would make important and sensible improvements to our nation's campaign-finance system. This legislation would go a long way in helping to eliminate special-interest money from the presidential campaigns and restoring the public's faith in the election process," said Collins

From 1976 to 2004, the presidential public funding system produced competitive elections in which Republicans were elected five times and Democrats three times, while challengers managed to be victorious in three of the six elections in which the incumbent was a candidate. But the front-loading of decisive primaries and the emergence of candidates able to raise money far in excess of the primary election spending limits have exposed the weaknesses of the current system. Both major party candidates accepted public financing for the 2004 general election, but candidates from both parties opted out of the primary election system. In the 2008 election, most of the leading candidates have declined to accept matching funds, and, for the first time since the system began, one or both major party nominees may refuse the general election grant in order to be able to spend unlimited money. The system will likely become even less attractive to candidates in the future if it is not revised and updated.

The bill is supported by a wide range of organizations supporting campaign reform including Americans for Campaign Reform, Campaign Legal Center, Common Cause, Committee for Economic Development, Democracy 21, League of Women Voters, Public Campaign, Public Citizen, and U.S. PIRG. Also see an editorial from Sunday's New York Times on the subject.

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Salvaging Public Financing for Presidential Campaigns

Remarks by Rep. David Price

Wednesday, December 5, 2007

"We've already heard about the massive amounts of money that will be raised and spent before voters choose their next president. The figures are astronomical – even 50% more than was collectively spent in 2004.

"We are witnessing a veritable arms race for campaign money. The system is obviously out of whack, and we must return it to sanity.

"Both parties' leading candidates are spending their valuable time raising money when they should be talking to voters – and they'd be the first to lament this fact. The fact is in order to remain competitive in this high-stakes presidential election, the current public funding system is simply untenable.

"Factors behind the erosion of the current system include declining participation in the tax 'check-off' program; unrealistic campaign spending limits; and increased need for early money due to the 'front-loading' of the primary calendar.

"Our proposal is simple: update the tax check-off, raise the spending limits, move up the release date, and create an 'escape hatch' that allows participating candidates to remain competitive even if a non-participating candidate out-raises them.

"This legislation would return the public financing system to its proper role – that of an equalizer. It was public financing that allowed long-shot candidates like a former California governor named Ronald Reagan and a former Georgia governor named Jimmy Carter to run viable campaigns against better-funded, better-known opponents.

"Public financing benefits both political parties equally, and most importantly, it benefits the American people, by reducing the influence of money in the electoral process and opening the field of candidates beyond those with the deepest coffers.

"We've also included an aggressive provision in this bill to disclose the major bundlers for the presidential campaigns. Of course, under a robust public financing system, the practice of bundling would become less relevant in the first place because candidates would be under less

pressure to raise so much money. But the disclosure provision is important for the benefit of an informed electorate.

"It's too late to affect the 2008 election, but we must act now to fix the system before 2012. I'm confident that this bipartisan, bicameral coalition can lead the way, and I am honored to be part of it."

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