

House Republicans will surely invoke their all-purpose rationale — deficit savings — as they try on Thursday to repeal the public financing option for presidential campaigns. This is the highly effective reform enacted after the Watergate scandal. It is revealing that just as a new era of unbridled corporate and special-interest money engulfs the 2012 elections, Republicans are determined to kill off the public financing option.

For decades, every major candidate opted for the subsidies and the spending limits until Congress failed to increase the federal match to account for campaign inflation. George W. Bush opted out for the primary fight in his 2000 campaign, seeking a larger war chest from private donors. Barack Obama dropped it for both the primary and general elections. He vowed to fix a "broken" system — not now as he enjoys unprecedented private financing.

The cynicism at work in the House is underlined by the fact that even as Republican leaders target the public option, the Republican Party has quietly requested and received a tidy \$17.7 million in public money to pay for its presidential convention next year (while offering no righteous outcries that it be offset by budget cutbacks).

Democratic Party leaders are also taking convention money, but at least House Democrats are fighting to repair, not bury, the public option. A strong measure to update donation formulas and campaign subsidies has been submitted by Representatives David Price of North Carolina and Chris Van Hollen of Maryland. It has the added virtue of continuing the Election Assistance Commission, set up after the 2000 presidential vote-count crisis to help upgrade state and local voting systems.

Republicans want to shut that down, too, in the name of mission accomplished. Not hardly. More than ever, voters need a robust public presidential option and a continuing Election Assistance Commission.