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H.21

Introduced by Representatives Townsend of South Burlington and Poirier of
Barre City

Referred to Committee on

Date:

Subject: Elections; campaign finance; public financing option; legislative
study committee

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to create a
legislative study committee tasked with evaluating the State's current public
campaign financing option, including whether the option should be expanded
so that it is made available to all candidates for statewide office and the
General Assembly.

An act relating to a study of Vermont's public campaign financing option

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. FINDINGS

The General Assembly finds that:

(1) Article 7 of Chapter I of the Constitution of the State of Vermont
affirms the central principle "That government is, or ought to be, instituted for
the common benefit, protection, and security of the people, nation, or

1 community, and not for the particular emolument or advantage of any single
2 person, family, or set of persons, who are a part only of that community.”

3 (2) To carry out this central principle that the government is for the
4 common benefit of the whole people of Vermont, a candidate needs to be
5 responsive to the community as a whole and not to a small portion which may
6 be funding the candidate’s electoral campaign.

7 (3) Our State’s current public campaign financing option supports the
8 common benefit principle because it requires a publicly financed candidate for
9 Governor or Lieutenant Governor to obtain qualifying contributions from a
10 relatively large number of registered Vermont voters who reside in different
11 geographic areas of our State.

12 (4) In addition to the number of qualifying contributions required,
13 Vermont’s public campaign financing option also sets a relatively low limit on
14 the amount that each voter may contribute in order for the candidate to reach
15 the total amount that qualifies him or her for public financing. Overall, these
16 requirements encourage a personal connection between the candidate and
17 voters by giving the candidate an incentive to conduct a grassroots campaign
18 that reaches many constituents and many donors, rather than relying on just a
19 few people to fund his or her campaign.

20 (5) When a candidate must rely on a multitude of Vermont voters’
21 contributions in order to qualify for public campaign financing, that reliance

1 reinforces the idea that our citizens' votes matter; that the candidate is working
2 for voters as a whole; and that the candidate does not need to rely on "big
3 money" in order to be elected. In effect, the public financing of campaigns
4 discourages the idea that an election is a fait accompli, dependent upon a
5 candidate obtaining large contributions from big money sources.

6 (6) Vermont is one of at least six states to offer full public financing of
7 campaigns — also called "clean elections" — but unlike Vermont, which only
8 offers public financing to candidates for Governor and Lieutenant Governor,
9 three of those states offer public campaign financing to legislative candidates
10 and two of those states also offer that public financing to all statewide
11 candidates.

12 (7) The public financing of campaigns is lauded by many individual
13 Vermont voters, campaign finance experts, and policy groups as a way to
14 decrease corruption and increase the number of candidates, voter participation,
15 and voters' voices in campaigns.

16 (8) This act is necessary to help determine whether Vermont should
17 expand its current public campaign financing option to candidates for offices
18 other than Governor and Lieutenant Governor and whether there are ways in
19 which our current system could otherwise be improved.

1 Sec. 2. PUBLIC CAMPAIGN FINANCING; LEGISLATIVE STUDY

2 COMMITTEE; REPORT

3 (a) Creation. There is created a Legislative Study Committee on Public
4 Campaign Financing to evaluate Vermont's existing public campaign financing
5 option in order to recommend whether the option should be expanded or
6 revised.

7 (b) Membership. The Committee shall be composed of the following six
8 members:

9 (1) three current members of the House Committee on Government
10 Operations, not all from the same political party, who shall be appointed by the
11 Speaker of the House; and

12 (2) three current members of the Senate Committee on Government
13 Operations, not all from the same political party, who shall be appointed by the
14 Committee on Committees.

15 (c) Powers and duties. The Committee shall study whether the State's
16 current public campaign financing option, set forth in 17 V.S.A. chapter 61,
17 subchapter 5, should be expanded or revised, including the following issues:

18 (1) whether the option should be expanded so that it is available to all
19 candidates for statewide office or the General Assembly, or both, and if so, for
20 each office, a recommendation regarding:

1 (A) any initial candidate qualifications that differ from those set forth
2 in 17 V.S.A. § 2983(a);

3 (B) the number of contributions, the limit on the amount that each
4 voter may contribute, and the total amount of contributions necessary to
5 qualify a candidate for the option;

6 (C) any geographical requirements for qualifying contributors; and

7 (D) the amount of the public financing grants for the primary election
8 period and the general election period, including whether an incumbent should
9 receive a reduced amount as set forth in 17 V.S.A. § 2985(b)(3);

10 (2) whether the State should offer tax incentives to voters who
11 contribute to publicly financed candidates, and if so, a description of any
12 incentive;

13 (3) whether the State should offer to voters vouchers that could be
14 converted into anonymous campaign contributions, and if so, a description of
15 that system; and

16 (4) whether the option should be funded by alternate means.

17 (d) Assistance. The Committee shall have the staff assistance of the Office
18 of Legislative Council and the Joint Fiscal Office.

19 (e) Report. On or before January 15, 2016, the Committee shall submit a
20 written report to the General Assembly with its findings and any

1 recommendations for legislative action. The Committee shall include in its
2 report an analysis of the fiscal impact of any of its recommendations.

3 (f) Meetings.

4 (1) The Speaker of the House and the President Pro Tempore of the
5 Senate shall call the first meeting of the Committee to occur on or before
6 July 1, 2015.

7 (2) The Committee shall select a chair from among its members at the
8 first meeting.

9 (3) A majority of the membership shall constitute a quorum.

10 (4) The Committee shall cease to exist on January 15, 2016.

11 (g) Reimbursement. For attendance at meetings during adjournment of the
12 General Assembly, legislative members of the Committee shall be entitled to
13 per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses pursuant to
14 2 V.S.A. § 406 for no more than six meetings.

15 Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

16 This act shall take effect on passage.