

San Diego Union-Tribune, July 27th, 2005

Group Wants Elections Publicly Financed

By Martin Stolz, Union-Tribune Staff Writer

As San Diegans voted yesterday for a new mayor, a coalition announced plans to collect signatures for a ballot initiative for public financing of municipal elections.

Public financing of election campaigns - called "clean elections" - has been enacted in municipalities such as New York City and Los Angeles, as well as for state elections in Arizona and Maine, said Amy Temple of California Common Cause.

Those systems require candidates to collect hundreds of small contributions - perhaps \$5 each - before they can qualify for the public support.

The mechanics of a campaign-financing system for San Diego would be worked out at public hearings, said John Hartley, a former San Diego City Council member who is involved with the San Diego Alliance for Clean Elections.

The San Diego Declaration of Independence from Private Money, " unveiled yesterday, says "clean elections are the only way to end corruption at San Diego's City Hall."

The coalition includes the League of Women Voters, the Sierra Club and California Common Cause. It hopes to begin collecting signatures from registered voters in January and place the measure on the November 2006 ballot, Hartley said.

Tito Zevallos, a fellow organizer, cited chaos in City Hall as the galvanizing force for reform. He mentioned the guilty verdicts in a corruption case involving two City Council members, the pension deficit in the city employees retirement system and former Mayor Dick Murphy's departure less than eight months into his second term.

"It's never been more clear to me why we need clean elections in San Diego," Zevallos said.

The system would be voluntary, so candidates could choose not to participate and collect larger contributions.

Temple said clean-election systems have increased voter participation and made contests more competitive, while bolstering the public's trust and diminishing the influence of special interests.

While the system's cost cannot be predicted until a study is completed, the dollar amount would be capped and the money divided fairly among the candidates, Hartley said.

He noted that campaign-finance reports show candidates spent \$2.6 million on the mayor's race through July 9.