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PUBLIC FUNDING FOR PUBLIC GUBERNATORIAL DEBATES

House Bill 4341

Sponsor: Rep. Edward LaForge

Committee: Constitutional Law and Ethics

Complete to 4-9-99

A SUMMARY OF HOUSE BILL 4341 AS INTRODUCED 2-25-99

The Michigan Campaign Finance Act provides for public funding of gubernatorial campaigns through a taxpayer-supported state campaign fund. Taxpayers have the option of directing their tax dollars to the fund when filling out their state income tax forms. Money from the fund is available to candidates for governor in both the primary and general elections. Candidates can get privately raised contributions of \$100 or less matched by dollars from the fund up to certain limits, with an overall spending limit of \$2 million per election, not including \$300,000 that can be spent on fundraising itself. Public Act 262 of 1993 amended the act in several ways, including raising the spending limit from \$1.5 million to \$2 million, increasing the amount (from \$2 to \$3) that a taxpayer can designate from his or her taxes to the State Campaign Fund, limiting "qualifying contributions" to those from Michigan residents only, making expenditures for soliciting contributions count toward a candidate's "qualified expenditures," limiting the amount that lapses to the state general fund from the State Campaign Fund (to the amount in excess of \$10 million, instead of the amount remaining in the State Campaign Fund on December 1 following a gubernatorial election), changing the distribution to minor political party nominees, and converting certain expenditure limitations under the act from a percentage to fixed dollar amounts.

The bill would eliminate public funding for gubernatorial campaigns and instead allow public funding for public debates at educational institutions among gubernatorial candidates. More specifically, the bill would limit the distribution of money from the state campaign fund to eligible educational institutions "for the sole purpose of sponsoring and broadcasting forums and debates of gubernatorial candidates," and would eliminate the current provisions regarding the public funding of gubernatorial campaigns through the state campaign fund.

An "eligible educational institution" would be defined to mean "a public elementary school, middle school, junior high school, high school, junior college, community college, college, or university in this state." Before the distribution of money under the bill, the state treasurer would be required to set aside enough money from the state campaign fund to fully implement the distribution formula, which would have to provide equitable access to the available money by all of the eligible educational institutions. To receive money under the bill, an eligible educational institution would have to complete an application form prescribed by the state treasurer, which form would have to include a description of the forum or debate to be held and the type of broadcast. If no forum or debate were held after an eligible educational institution received money to sponsor a forum or debate, the money would have to be returned to the state treasurer not later than five business days after the gubernatorial election.

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Repealer. The bill would repeal sections 62 to 71 of the Michigan Campaign Finance Act, which specify how gubernatorial candidates become eligible to receive money from the state campaign fund, application procedures, provisions regarding qualifying contributions, payments from the fund to candidates, etc.

MCL 169.261

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