



MIDWEST DEMOCRACY NETWORK

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

THE RESPONSES OF JOHN EDWARDS AND BARACK OBAMA

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I. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Issue: Presidential Public Financing System

Question I-A:

As President, would you support and work to enact legislation to strengthen, keep the same, or repeal the presidential public financing system?

Strengthen

Keep the same

Repeal

EDWARDS: I would strengthen the public financing system. I believe that the system for financing American elections is rigged to amplify the influence of powerful and wealthy individuals as both donors and candidates. Few top-tier presidential candidates accept public financing, and candidates rely on wealthy, well-connected “bundlers” to help them raise tens of millions of dollars. The Internet has enabled a boom in small donations from regular people, but wealthy donors and bundlers still supplied nearly 80 percent of candidate contributions in the first quarter of 2007.

The first step toward getting the policies we want is to put regular people back in charge of Washington. As president, I will create a new Grassroots Presidential Financing System to empower regular Americans in a potentially universal public financing system for presidential campaign.

Right now, any individual can donate up to \$2,300 to a campaign. That means candidates are spending their time glad-handing with the tiny fraction of Americans who can write a \$2,300 check. I will rewrite the rules to put small donors in charge by matching the first \$100 of donations at a rate of eight to one, making two \$100 donations as valuable as a single \$1,000 donation. I will also reduce the maximum contribution from \$2,300 to \$1,000 per person to better reflect the incomes of most Americans and update the campaign spending limits to attract all candidates in to the system.

OBAMA: Strengthen

Question I-B:

If you are nominated for President in 2008 and your major opponents agree to forgo private funding in the general election campaign, will you participate in the presidential public financing system?

Yes

No

EDWARDS: Yes. I believe in committing to public financing for the entire presidential campaign. The Democratic nominee should be fighting for the American people – not fighting

over who can raise more money from lobbyists. In the general election, I will challenge the Republican nominee to join us in accepting public financing. Quite frankly, it's a fight I'd welcome. Voters will be faced with a clear choice between a party who is bought and sold for by lobbyists, PACs, and other corporate insiders, and someone who has spent his entire career fighting the special interests, and winning. If they refuse, I'll cross that bridge when I come to it.

OBAMA: Yes. I have been a long-time advocate for public financing of campaigns combined with free television and radio time as a way to reduce the influence of moneyed special interests. I introduced public financing legislation in the Illinois State Senate, and am the only 2008 candidate to have sponsored Senator Russ Feingold's (D-WI) bill to reform the presidential public financing system. In February 2007, I proposed a novel way to preserve the strength of the public financing system in the 2008 election. My plan requires both major party candidates to agree on a fundraising truce, return excess money from donors, and stay within the public financing system for the general election. My proposal followed announcements by some presidential candidates that they would forgo public financing so they could raise unlimited funds in the general election. The Federal Election Commission ruled the proposal legal, and Senator John McCain (r-AZ) has already pledged to accept this fundraising pledge. If I am the Democratic nominee, I will aggressively pursue an agreement with the Republican nominee to preserve a publicly financed general election.

Issue: Congressional Public Financing

Question I-C:

If elected President, would you support and work to enact legislation creating a voluntary public financing system for congressional candidates?

Yes

No

EDWARDS: Yes. All the money in politics is making it extremely difficult for non-wealthy candidates to run. Everyone should have the same chance to run for office that I had. But today, the cost of even a congressional campaign is climbing into the millions. There is no public financing for congressional races. Unfortunately, our broken system helps create the perception that to run for office, you either need to be very wealthy or willing to be very bought by the special interests.

As president, I will fix this by creating full public financing for House and Senate races. That way, regular Americans can run for office without having to cozy up to big contributors. Candidates who raise a certain number of \$5 contributions will receive equal public financing and air time, while additional "fair fight" funds will help candidates facing self-financed campaigns and independent expenditures. States with these models – like Maine and Arizona – have reported more political accountability and candidates from more diverse backgrounds.

OBAMA: Yes. I am a cosponsor of the Fair Elections Now Act because I believe it imperative that we get big money out of the political process. That's why I have also made the pledge that my campaign will not accept money from special interest PACs or registered federal lobbyists.

Issue: 527 Groups**Question I-D:**

Do you believe that Section 527 groups which are organized primarily to affect federal elections should be required by the Federal Election Commission and/or Congress to comply with the campaign finance laws that apply to all other candidate, party and political committees whose goal is to influence federal elections?

Yes **No**

EDWARDS: We can and must do two things at once: ensure that citizens and groups are able to express their views on public issues and combat loopholes in our campaign finance system allowing soft money to target candidates. The recent Supreme Court decision in *Wisconsin Right-to-Life v. FEC* has unfortunately made the line between issue advocacy and electioneering even less clear. Hopefully, the FEC's record penalties for 527 groups that operated like electioneering committees in the 2004 campaign will have a deterrent effect the commissioners intend. If not, I will ask the Congress to address the proper role of 527s along with my proposals to empower small donors in a new Grassroots Presidential Financing System and offer full public financing to congressional candidates.

OBAMA: Yes.

Issue: U.S. Senate Campaign Disclosure**Question I-E:**

In the interest of increasing transparency and public accountability, should incumbent Senators, Senate candidates, and Senate campaign committees be required to file their campaign finance disclosure reports electronically?

Yes **No**

EDWARDS: Yes. Electronic filing has increased transparency and public accountability in the presidential campaign process and it can do the same for Senate campaigns.

OBAMA: Yes.

Issue: FEC Reform**Question I-F:**

As President, will you actively support and sign legislation that would replace the current Federal Election Commission with a new and more effective enforcement agency?

Yes **No**

EDWARDS: Yes. The political appointees on the Federal Election Commission are too often captive to the political status quo. The current structure of the FEC – with a bipartisan, even number of commissioners – is a recipe for gridlock and stalemate. We should consider a new, more powerful and independent agency that includes a judicial approach.

OBAMA: I believe that the FEC needs to be strengthened and that individuals named to the Commission should have a demonstrated record of fair administration of the law and an ability to overcome partisan biases. My initial goal as president will be to determine whether we can make the FEC more effective through appointments. What the FEC needs most is strong, impartial leadership that will promote integrity in our election system. That’s precisely why I led the opposition to Hans von Spakovsky to serve a full term at the Commission. As president, I will appoint nominees to the Commission who are committed to enforcing our nation’s election laws. Unlike von Spakovsky, my nominees will not have a record of poor management, divisiveness, and inappropriate partisanship.

II. GOVERNMENT ETHICS

Issue: Executive Branch Reforms

Question II-A:

Because many citizens believe the President bears a special responsibility for setting and enforcing high standards of honesty, transparency and accountability in government, what specific steps, if any, would you take, as President, to:

- (1) Slowdown or close the “revolving door” for high-ranking and influential administration officials who leave their positions to become high paid registered lobbyists?

EDWARDS: I will close the lobbyist revolving door by banning top government officials from becoming lobbyists. I will restore the executive order barring appointees from lobbying their former colleagues for five years, created by President Clinton but rescinded in his last days. I will also enact it by statute so that no president can revoke it and expand the definition of prohibited lobbying to include directing strategy on lobbying campaigns, not just making direct contact with officials. I will also close the revolving door in the other direction by barring individuals who acted as federal lobbyists in the preceding two years from taking senior executive jobs with responsibility for the subject areas on which they lobbied.

OBAMA: Early in my campaign, I released a proposal to close the revolving door between the executive branch and lobbying shops. I will prohibit all political appointees from working on contracts related to their former employer for two years, and I will prohibit appointees from lobbying the executive branch after leaving office for the remainder of his administration. My political appointees will serve the American people, not their own financial interests.

(2) Limit or ban the acceptance of gifts by administration employees from lobbyists and others with an interest in influencing policy?

EDWARDS: From March 2006 to April 2007, corporations and trade groups paid for more than 200 trips for executives of agencies that regulated or did business with them. I will prohibit gifts and travel from lobbyists or their employer to executive branch officials and staff.

OBAMA: I will restore objectivity to the executive branch by banning lobbyist gifts, assuring that political appointees get their jobs based on merit and not solely on the basis of political affiliation or contribution, and removing the use of public office for partisan advantage.

(3) End insider abuses in the federal government's no-bid contract procedures?

EDWARDS: A recent congressional study found that under the Bush administration, federal spending on no-bid or "sole source" contracts without "full and open" competition has tripled. These contracts have slowed progress in the post-Katrina Gulf Coast region and in Iraq. Competition ensures that taxpayers get the best value. I will reform purchasing to limit the use of sole-source contracts and the commercial item loophole. I will also root out collusion bidding by requiring contractors to disclose subcontractor relationships and possible conflicts of interest. To take campaign cash out of contracting, I will bar federal contractors – including their senior executives, lobbyists and director – from making donations to office holders, candidates and political parties for one year before or after bidding on any major government contract.

OBAMA: The current administration has abused its power by handing out contracts without competition to its politically connected friends and supporters. These abuses cost taxpayers billions of dollars each year. I will end abuse of no-bid contracts by requiring competitive bidding on all contracts over \$25,000 unless the contracting officer provides a written justification that the contract falls within a specified exception.

(4) Provide the public with information about the sponsors, purposes and beneficiaries of the special interest-supported appropriation "earmarks" approved by Congress?

EDWARDS: I support increased disclosure around earmarks, but we must do more. To put an end to the rampant abuse of earmarks, I will enact a new form of line-item veto – "expedited rescission" – that would allow the president to single out pork spending provisions in bills and send them back to Congress for required up or down votes. Congress could earmark money only by going on the record in support of each special-interest provision, one by one.

OBAMA: Building on my "Google for Government" bill, which was signed into law and allows every American to do a simple search and see exactly how federal money is being spent, I will ensure that any tax breaks to special interests, or tax earmarks, are publicly available by directing the Office of Management and Budget to post them on its website. I will also create a "contracts and influence" database which will disclose how much federal contractors spend on lobbying, ensuring that citizens have easy access to contract details and contractor performance, such as compliance with federal regulations.

(5) Publicly disclose the content, participants and outcomes of closed-door policy-related discussions involving high administration officials and interest group representatives and lobbyists?

EDWARDS: Recent legislation expands disclosure of lobbying activity, but still delays information by three months and doesn't provide enough detail to expose the real chains of influence. I will require lobbyists to disclose within 48 hours which federal office candidates, members, staff and executive officials they met with, which legislative or regulatory items they discussed, and any contributions made or raised for that official. Lobbyists will also have to disclose prior employment by the government or a contractor and any close relationship to a current member of Congress, staff member, or executive branch employee. I will also – unlike Vice-president Cheney, who fought to keep his Energy Task Force members secret – uphold the Federal Advisory Committee Act to ensure that Americans know who is really influencing national policy.

OBAMA: I will require my appointees who lead the executive branch departments and rulemaking agencies to conduct the significant business of the agency in public, so that any citizen can see in person or watch on the Internet as the agencies debate and deliberate the issues that affect American society. Videos of meetings will be archived on the web, and transcripts will be made available to the public. I will also require my appointees to commit to employ all the technological tools available to allow average citizens not just to observe, but to participate and be heard on the issue that affect their daily lives.

I will also ensure that communications about regulatory policymaking between private individuals and all White House staff are disclosed to the public. The Obama White House would only invoke executive privilege to protect the confidentiality of communications concerning national security and similar traditionally sensitive matters, not to withhold information about communications with special interests on regulatory policy.

Finally, under the Presidential Records Act, presidential records are supposed to be released to the public 12 years after the end of a presidential administration. In November 2001, President Bush issued an order that gave current and former presidents and vice presidents broad authority to withhold presidential records or delay their release indefinitely. As president, I will nullify the Bush order and establish procedures to ensure the timely release of presidential records.

Issue: Congressional Reforms

Question II-B:

If you were President now, would you sign, veto, or try to amend S. 1?

Yes

No

EDWARDS: Yes, I would have signed it. The resulting Public Law 110-81 contains a number of important provisions, including increased penalties for lobbyists who fail to comply with

disclosure requirements, more limitations on gifts and benefits from lobbyists, and restrictions designed to make high-ranking congressional staff wait a year after leaving Capital Hill before becoming lobbyists. These regulations were much needed and they will help begin the work of taking power out of the hands of lobbyists.

But I believe that we need to do more, including banning campaign contributions and bundling by lobbyists. For instance, I believe that there should be a five year ban on lobbying after leaving a job in government, and that the ban should work both ways to also prohibit lobbyists from taking jobs in government related to the industries they lobbied for.

OBAMA: I voted for S. 1, the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007, and will enforce that law as president.

III. COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Issue: Broadcasters' Public Interest Obligations

Question III-A

Do you support regulatory and legislative efforts to clarify the public interest obligations of broadcasters, including adoption of new license processing guidelines that would encourage digital broadcasters to (1) air a certain minimum number of hours of qualifying civic and/or election-related programming each week and (2) file periodic reports with the Federal Communications Commission detailing how stations are meeting this and related guidelines?

Yes

No

EDWARDS: Yes. America's radio and television broadcasters use our public airwaves—worth more than half a trillion dollars—for free. Until radical industry deregulation in the 1980s, the government required that they serve the public interest in return, with public interest obligations on minimum public affairs programming, a Fairness Doctrine, modest limits on advertising, and most importantly a vigorous license renewal process. The subsequent concentration of media ownership into a few corporate hands and the loss of localism and independence makes the public interest tradition in broadcasting more important than ever.

I will appoint FCC Commissioners who will immediately define robust public interest obligations for digital broadcasters—a task 12 years overdue. These obligations will include closed-captioning and other tools for people with disabilities. I will also use the license renewal process to vigorously review whether broadcasters have served their local communities, ending the current rubber-stamp “postcard renewal.”

OBAMA: Yes.

Issue: Media Vouchers

Question III-B:

In the interest of mitigating the high costs of election campaigns, fostering electoral competition, and enabling more candidates to communicate with voters, would you, if elected President, support and sign legislation that would (1) provide qualifying congressional candidates and party committees with vouchers with which to pay for some broadcast advertising time; (2) impose a modest user fee on broadcasters' gross advertising revenues to underwrite the voucher program; and (3) allow qualified candidates and parties to purchase non-preemptible advertising time at rates below stations' lowest unit charges during the final weeks of primary and general election campaigns?

Yes **No**

EDWARDS: Yes, I support these proposals. Public support for campaigns, such as help with buying air time, can encourage people from more diverse backgrounds to run for office. Providing candidates in the general presidential election and in congressional races with vouchers for air time has helped to even the playing field and provide voters with the information they need. As long as broadcasters receive a valuable public resource – America's air waves – for free, they should be expected to make contributions in the public interest.

OBAMA: Yes.

IV. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION**Issue: Federal Funding for Election Reform**

Question IV-A: Do you support ongoing federal funding to improve the conduct of federal elections in exchange for better information from state and local election authorities on how they are administering elections and whether they are complying with federal law?

Yes **No**

EDWARDS: Yes. Every American – no matter what precinct or state they vote in – should be able to trust that their vote will count. As president, I will maintain a strong federal role in supporting fair and effective election administration. I will also eliminate concerns over the partisan administration of elections by prohibiting chief state election officials from publicly supporting federal candidates.

OBAMA: Yes.

Issue: Voter Protection**Question IV-B:**

As President, will you insist that the Department of Justice vigorously enforce the Voting Rights Act and other federal laws in order to curtail practices and procedures that have a disproportionately negative impact on the political participation of minority, low-income, disabled, and elderly voters?

Yes

No

EDWARDS: Yes. America ought to set an example with the most trustworthy, inclusive and secure election system in the world. But recent elections have exposed major flaws, from insecure voting machines to laws and practices that disenfranchise citizens. Forty years after the Voting Rights Act, we still have work to do to ensure a meaningful right to vote for every American regardless of their skin color.

I will secure Americans' voting rights by requiring the use of paper ballots verified by voters. Voting machines will ensure access for people with disabilities and foreign-language speakers, use transparent and publicly accountable open-source software, and be verified by mandatory audits.

I will also enact a new law making intentional interference with the right to vote a federal offense and providing tough penalties for political parties, officials and individuals. I will establish a Department of Justice task force to investigate patterns of dirty election tricks nationwide. To eliminate concerns over the partisan administration of elections, I will prohibit chief state election officials from publicly supporting federal candidates.

Finally, I will restore the right to vote in all federal elections to ex-offenders who have served their sentences and support the right to Washington, D.C. residents to have voting representation in Congress.

OBAMA: For too many elections, misinformation and intimidation have kept thousands of Americans from voting. During the 2006 election, for example, thousands of Latino voters in Orange County, California received letters telling them that immigrants who voted would be jailed – implying that this applied to naturalized citizens. In Maryland, voters received fabricated sample Democratic ballots that featured Republican candidates for governor and senator. And in Virginia, voters were phoned by a fraudulent “Virginia Elections Commission” claiming they were ineligible to vote. These tactics most often target vulnerable communities, such as minorities, the elderly, and the disabled.

That's why I introduced the Deceptive Practices and Voter Intimidation Act. The bill, which recently passed the Senate Judiciary Committee, will make voter intimidation and election misinformation punishable by law, and contains strong penalties for those who commit these crimes. Furthermore, it would establish a process for providing misinformed voters with accurate information so they can cast their votes in time.

Issue: Voter Registration

Question IV-C:

As President, would you work to ensure that every eligible citizen can easily register to vote by vigorously enforcing the National Voter Registration Act's requirements that registration services be provided at motor vehicle facilities, public assistance offices, and agencies serving people with disabilities?

Yes **No**

EDWARDS: Yes. The NVRA has great potential to register more Americans, but it has been poorly and unevenly enforced in many states. I also believe that we should expand registration opportunities. Because election-day registration is a proven way to raise voter turnout, I will require it for federal elections and encourage states to offer no-excuse voting.

OBAMA: Yes.

V. REDISTRICTING

Issue: Once-A-Decade Redistricting**Question V-A:**

As President, would you support federal legislation prohibiting states from redrawing valid congressional district lines more than once a decade?

Yes **No**

EDWARDS: Yes. Mid-decade redistricting has been shown to result in partisan conflict and outcomes. Voters should be choosing their representatives—not the other way around.

OBAMA: I opposed the partisan mid-decade gerrymandering that Tom Delay engineered in Texas. I believe that mid-decade redistricting is rarely justified. There may be some exceptional cases, such as a natural disaster, that create population shifts that may warrant mid-decade redistricting. But I do not support state efforts to redraw otherwise valid congressional district lines more than once a decade.

Issue: Independent Redistricting Commissions**Question V-B:**

As President, would you support federal legislation requiring states to form diverse, transparent, and independent redistricting commissions to redraw congressional district lines?

Yes **No**

EDWARDS: Independent redistricting commissions could be an effective way to ensure fairness in the redistricting process. I will encourage states to consider independent redistricting

commissions that promote competitiveness, community cohesion, and full adherence to Voting Rights Act protections.

OBAMA: I would encourage states to form such commissions.