

Total Transparency

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Our democracy works best when voters make an informed decision at the ballot box, based on their familiarity with a candidate's position on important issues, such as health care and education. Voters watch debates, read news stories and talk to friends and neighbors to learn about a candidate's views. But perhaps more revealing of a candidate's beliefs than what he or she says are the political financial records that must be filed with my office. A candidate who receives a political donation from the National Rifle Association, for instance, is likely to be a strong advocate of gun rights; while a donation from NARAL Pro-Choice America reveals a candidate's position on abortion.

Voters have a right to know who is contributing to candidates for public office; and in a time when last-minute political attack ads are the norm, the public must be able to access this information easily and immediately.

That is why, beginning October 1, 2007, my office will require political campaigns to file their financial disclosure statements over the internet. Without this electronic filing requirement, a campaign can choose to file their financial statements in paper form, essentially withholding their finances from public scrutiny for perhaps several weeks while my staff manually enters the information into the campaign finance database. This new electronic filing requirement will give the public and the media instant access to the contributions and expenditures of political campaigns.

But in addition to requiring political campaigns to report their finances electronically, we must also make it easier for the public to access this information online. Therefore, I have announced a complete overhaul of the website used to search and analyze the financial reports of political campaigns.

The goal is total transparency.

The current campaign finance website is antiquated and cumbersome to use. Information that should be readily available often requires a user to visit multiple web pages and do multiple searches. My office routinely gets questions from the public on how to locate specific information that should be more easily found.

For instance, if you wanted to know who donated to the campaign in support of Referendum C, you would first need to know the official name of the issue committee, "Vote Yes on C & D." Simply typing in "Referendum C" will get you nowhere. Then, *ten* clicks of the mouse later, you would be able to view contributions made to the committee, but only by clicking on one report at a time. There is no way to generate a list of every single donation made to the committee in one, easy to read spreadsheet.

Over the past several years this office has implemented technical changes to the website to keep up with changing campaign finance laws and to make the information more accessible. However, the system is in need of an entire overhaul.

As a first step, I requested legislation to appropriate funds to this office to conduct the website overhaul. Senate Bill 07-259, sponsored by Senator Ken Gordon (D-Denver) and Representative Morgan Carroll (D-Aurora), passed with near unanimous support last session.

I then convened a bi-partisan task force to analyze the current website and make recommendations to my office on how the new system should look.

The Campaign Finance Disclosure Task Force is comprised of lawmakers - Representative Carroll, Senator Gordon and Representative Jim Kerr (R-Littleton) - and representatives of the media, the major political parties, county clerks and my staff.

The task force will hold public meetings throughout the summer to receive testimony from the public and various users of the campaign finance system, including elected officials, representatives from the political parties, county clerks, campaign finance software vendors and members of the media.

Each of the public meetings will focus on a different component of the campaign finance system. The first public meeting is scheduled for 5:00 PM on Thursday, July 12 at the Secretary of State's office at 1700 Broadway, Denver, Colorado. The meeting will focus on how the financial data is entered into the system by political campaigns. Task force members will seek testimony from political campaign committees, campaign treasurers and other registered agents who enter data into the system.

Running for public office is, by definition, a public endeavor. Nothing is beyond the scope of public examination. In an age when every word uttered and action taken is examined, discussed and then re-examined to try to uncover the truth, or at least someone's interpretation of it, political donations can be the most revealing thing of all. I am committed to making those political donations as accessible as possible.