

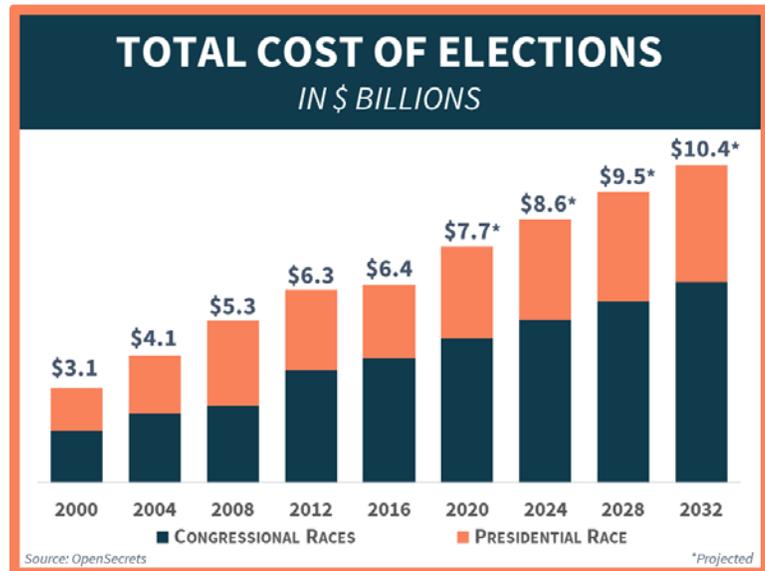


HOUSE  
BUDGET  
COMMITTEE

# Taxpayer Financed Campaigns

Adding to a long list of expensive proposals, many Democrats have supported public financing of federal campaigns. While a public funding option for presidential campaigns has existed since the early 1970s, no major party's presidential campaign has accepted public funding since 2008.<sup>1</sup> Yet, this proposal would require taxpayer financing of all federal campaigns, congressional and presidential, and would be detrimental not only to free speech, but also to the federal budget.

**Taxpayer Financed Campaigns Would Bust the Federal Budget.** Unlike the existing Presidential Election Campaign Fund, which is funded by voluntary contributions made via an individual's 1040 federal income tax form, a mandate for public financing of congressional and presidential campaigns would require a significant annual appropriation from the Federal Government—funded by taxpayer dollars or federal borrowing. Since the 2000 election cycle, the costs associated with federal elections have increased by 110 percent; growing from a little over \$3 billion to almost \$6.5 billion spent in the 2016 election cycle.<sup>2</sup> If the costs of congressional and presidential campaigns continue to rise, federal public financing could cost the government over \$10 billion by the 2024 election cycle.



**Taxpayer Financed Campaigns Are Unworkable.** In addition to the cost of requiring public financing of federal campaigns, the underlying policy could have serious constitutional ramifications with regards to free speech. If campaigns were only funded publicly, organizations – nonprofits, corporations, labor unions, and other associations – would essentially be prohibited from conducting independent expenditures on behalf of federal candidates, political parties, and the like. As their tax dollars would support all federal candidates, individuals would also have their right to free association restricted. Individual taxpayers would be effectively supporting candidates with whom they may disagree. A proposal of this magnitude would be a drastic divergence from decades of federal election law and precedent and could be used to specifically target and restrict certain ideological groups from making their voices heard.

While some studies have suggested that the use of public funding for state-level campaigns have made elections more competitive, evidence has also shown that public financing has led to an increase in polarization and, ultimately, failed to provide the panacea that its advocates have promised.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

**Republican Solutions for Taxpayer Financed Campaigns.** Every American's voice should be heard. Republicans in Congress have consistently worked to protect free speech and the Constitution; this includes addressing artificial campaign limits set by the Federal Government. With the technology of campaigning evolving every cycle and new mediums emerging constantly, having the Federal Government shoulder campaign costs would waste precious taxpayer dollars that could be better spent on the real needs of all Americans.

1. "Public funding of presidential elections," Federal Election, <https://www.fec.gov/introduction-campaign-finance/understanding-ways-support-federal-candidates/presidential-elections/public-funding-presidential-elections/>.  
2. "Cost of Election," OpenSecrets.org, <https://www.opensecrets.org/overview/cost.php?display=T&inf=N>.  
3. "More than Combating Corruption: The Other Benefits of Public Financing," Mimi Marziani, Laura Moy, Adam Skaggs, Marcus Williams, Brennan Center for Justice, October 2011, <https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/more-combating-corruption-other-benefits-public-financing>.  
4. "Evidence suggests that switching to publicly funded elections is rarely a game-changer," Bill Turque, The Washington Post, September 2014, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/md-politics/evidence-suggests-that-switching-to-publicly-funded-elections-is-rarely-a-game-changer/2014/09/25/aaabb55a-4267-11e4-b437-1a7368204804\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.7086474f5b2d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/md-politics/evidence-suggests-that-switching-to-publicly-funded-elections-is-rarely-a-game-changer/2014/09/25/aaabb55a-4267-11e4-b437-1a7368204804_story.html?utm_term=.7086474f5b2d).  
5. "How public funding of elections makes politics even more polarized," John Sides, The Washington Post, January 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/01/15/how-public-funding-of-elections-makes-politics-even-more-polarized/?utm\\_term=.94db07433287](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/01/15/how-public-funding-of-elections-makes-politics-even-more-polarized/?utm_term=.94db07433287).