

Arizona Advocacy Network

1616 E Indian School Road, Suite 340 Phoenix, AZ 85016 602-297-2500 www.azadvocacy.org

A Brief History of Corruption Leading to Arizona Voters' Adoption of the Clean Elections System.

In 1991, Arizona Voters witnessed nearly 10 percent of their State legislature indicted on corruption-related charges in a scandal that came to be known as AzScam. Video of the sting showed legislators stuffing tens of thousands of dollars into gym bags while making comments such as, "I sold way too cheap" and "There's not an issue in the world I give a [expletive] about."

After AzScam, Arizona voters continued to read reports of improprieties involving campaign contributions, including threats of legislative reprisals against lobbyists who raised funds for the minority party's candidates. Public perceptions of such corruption were well documented in the Arizona Republic:

- *Invisible Legislature: Dollars and Bills: Lobbyists' Influence Spreads Far But Often Goes Unrecorded* by Jonathan Sidener and Kris Mayes (January 21, 1996)
- *Invisible Legislature, Lobbyists Bearing Gifts Solidify Grip on Capitol* by Kris Mayes and Michael Murphy (December 22, 1996)
- *Invisible Legislature: Holiday premium on fund-raising, Arizona lawmakers going for broke before Jan. 12 end to soliciting season* by Michael Murphy (December 14, 1997)
- *Invisible Legislature: GOP drafts lobbyists for help in crucial races, Senate chief reputedly warns them not to raise funds for Democrats* by Chris Moeser (August 20, 1998)

AzScam and the subsequent reports tying contributions to corruption inspired a grass roots movement to enact public funding of elections and lowering of limits on contributions to candidates running traditionally funded campaigns.

The Act offers statewide and legislative candidates public funding for their campaigns as a voluntary alternative to the traditional system of private fundraising that led to AzScam. Public campaign funding frees candidates from the need to raise private campaign contributions, thereby reducing the potential for such contributions to corruptively influence candidates and office holders.

The system of public funding has been described as the "Clean Elections System" not because it was designed to "clean up" political discourse and politics in general, but to provide public funding which is perceived to be "clean" compared to private contributions which can be and frequently are perceived to be corrupt to the extent that they are contributed and raised by lobbyists and other special interests with the intent of gaining special access to the public officials who accept such contributions.