

Monday, August 31, 2009

## Our view: Campaign law protects incumbents – editorial

*Connecticut's public financing law will be better when fixed  
so its true purpose can be achieved*

It shouldn't have come as a surprise to anyone that a federal judge has struck down the state's public financing law as unconstitutional. More than a year ago, we raised the issue of fairness in how third-party and independent candidates are denied the same consideration as major party — Democrats and Republicans — candidates.

It's also not surprising the General Assembly, consisting of only Democrats and Republicans, did nothing to correct the problem last session. Because that would have meant allowing potential third-party and independent challengers to compete on an equal financial basis with them.

But as Judge Stefan Underhill noted in his ruling, the law, as written, enhances the major party candidates' strength beyond their past ability to raise campaign contributions, while unfairly imposing extra criteria on minor-party and independent candidates to qualify for public funds.

The purpose of the public financing law was to create level playing fields, thus eliminating special interest influence and creating more competitive races.

Nonpartisan groups have called Connecticut's law one of the best in country. Even the state's congressional delegation has championed it as a possible model for federal elections.

### **Into a corner**

But until the law is amended so that it truly achieves the goal of providing a level playing field for all candidates, it is nothing more than a self-serving measure of incumbency protection.

Fortunately, last week's court ruling will now force lawmakers to fix it.

And while they're at it, we hope they'll also address the other flaw in the law that we have called for — the elimination of the provision that allows candidates with no challengers to still collect a percentage of the public funds to spend on token campaigns that they can't lose.

Because incumbents are typically the only candidates who run unopposed and already have strong name recognition within their districts and other built-in advantages available to them, public funds should not be made available to them for further self-promotion.