

Campaign finance reform bill faces opposition

By: Soly Moustafa / The Daily Cardinal - January 30, 2008

The bill seeks to put more public funds into the election process, but might not pass this session.

A hearing was held in the state Senate Tuesday on a campaign finance reform bill, though it appears unlikely to pass this legislative session.

The bill asks for less strict requirements to qualify for state funding when running for office, and to give funding to politicians competing in primaries.

“Our campaign structure is broken. Our candidates are spending more time raising money than they are talking issues, knocking on doors, or expressing themselves,” said co-author of the bill state Sen. Fred Risser, D-Madison.

Senate Bill 182 resembles the campaign finance reform bill drafted earlier this month by Gov. Jim Doyle, but has a more specific focus. Risser said Doyle's bill is more comprehensive.

A secondary purpose of the bill is to combat the influence of special interest groups in the Wisconsin Legislature. Risser said special interest groups are able to dramatically alter the way government works.

Another co-sponsor of the bill, state Rep. Gordon Hintz, D-Oshkosh, said he also supports the bill partly because it would restrict the influence of corporate special interest donations.

The outcome of the hearing, however, is difficult to determine.

Despite the fact no lawmakers at the hearing registered against the bill, the chance the bill would pass all the way through the Legislature is doubtful, according to Risser.

Risser said the bill is unlikely to pass this session because it has to face many more committees and “wait in line” behind Doyle's bill.

Campaign Finance Reform, Rural Issues and Information Technology Committee member, Sen. Dan Kapanke, R-La Crosse, said he was apprehensive about allowing the bill to pass.

“There are other issues like taxes, jobs, healthcare, which I think trump campaign finance reform,” he said.

The bill would cost \$13 million to implement, according to Risser.

Similar to the national McCain-Feingold campaign law, the bill might raise issues of constitutionality concerning its restrictions on how private political donations are spent. Risser and Hintz both acknowledged constitutionality as a concern, but saw it as an issue that would be raised only after implementation of the bill.
