

VOTE NO ON H.R. 2019

July 22, 2013

Dear Representative,

Our organizations strongly urge you to vote no on H.R. 2019 sponsored by Representative Gregg Harper (R-MS), which purports to provide for a 10-year pediatric research initiative and repeals the presidential public financing system.

Our organizations include the Americans for Campaign Reform, Brennan Center for Justice, the Campaign Legal Center, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, Common Cause, Democracy 21, Demos, the League of Women Voters, Public Citizen and U.S PIRG.

H.R. 2019 would repeal an important anti-corruption campaign finance law which worked well for most of its existence and provided ordinary Americans with a critical role to play in financing presidential elections. The presidential public financing system needs to be repaired, not repealed.

Presidential candidates long recognized the value of the alternative system for financing their elections. Almost all candidates from both major parties voluntarily used the system to pay for their presidential campaigns from 1976 through 2004. Thereafter, the presidential funding system began to break down because no steps were taken by Congress to update the system.

The 2012 election made clear that the presidential public financing system is essential both to prevent corruption and to provide candidates with an alternative way to finance their campaigns without having to rely on influence-seeking bundlers and donors.

Legislation to restore an effective presidential public financing system, H.R. 270, has been introduced in this Congress by Representatives David Price (D-NC) and Chris Van Hollen (D-MD).

In the last Congress, Representative Harper introduced H.R. 3463, legislation to reduce federal spending and the deficit by terminating taxpayer financing of presidential election campaigns and party conventions. In this Congress, Representative Harper has introduced H.R. 2019, legislation to eliminate taxpayer financing of presidential campaigns and party conventions and reprogram savings to provide for a 10-year pediatric research initiative.

The two Harper bills vary in their purported approaches, but have the same basic purpose – to repeal a fundamentally important anti-corruption campaign finance law.

In a Dear Colleague sent on July 8, 2013, Representatives Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) and Nita Lowey (D-NY) show that H.R. 2019 would not really do anything to increase spending for pediatric research.

Representative DeLauro is Ranking Member on the Labor, Health and Human Services Subcommittee and Representative Lowey is Ranking Member on the House Appropriations Committee.

According to their Dear Colleague letter:

Even though the \$13 million it purports to make available for that purpose is minuscule, relative to current spending or the \$1.55 billion lost by NIH to sequestration this year, some Members may nevertheless feel inclined to support the measure on the theory that \$13 million is better than nothing. We stand with those who support pediatric research, but the bill would not increase these much needed investments.

According to the letter:

[H.R. 2019] does terminate public financing for campaigns, but it does *not* appropriate the savings for research. Rather, it specifies that those amounts shall be available to NIH “only to the extent and in such amounts as are provided in advance in appropriation Acts”. In short, the bill makes no appropriations but instead merely authorizes them to be made.

The Dear Colleague letter pointed out that the Harper bill places the funds in the normal appropriations process where they are subject to the allocation levels already set by the House for such funds and it does not increase the funds available to be spent. The letter noted:

The reason funding for biomedical research has been decreasing is not because of some shortage of authorizing legislation, and piling on one more unfunded authorization of appropriations will not interrupt that downward trend even for a moment.

The letter stated:

[I]t is also interesting to note the small size of the amount which H.R. 2019 even authorizes to be appropriated: \$13 million per year. To put that amount in perspective, NIH reports spending \$3.6 billion on pediatric research last year. Other relevant comparisons might be to the \$1.55 billion that NIH lost to sequestration and the similar size cut of \$1.6 billion that the House Republicans sought for NIH appropriations in H.R. 1, the budget cutting package they passed after taking office in 2011.

The letter concluded:

In short, the “Kids First Research Act” is little more than a fig leaf for the majority’s dismal record on support for medical research.

H.R. 2019 is also a fig leaf to mask its real purpose. The legislation is not a serious effort to increase funding for pediatric research, but rather the fourth attempt by House Republican leaders, beginning in the last Congress, to kill the presidential public financing system.

This is the real issue House members will be voting on when this legislation reaches the House floor.

The presidential public financing system is necessary to protect citizens against government corruption and to provide presidential candidates with an alternative, citizen-based means to finance their campaigns.

We strongly urge you to vote to preserve essential anti-corruption campaign finance legislation by voting against H.R. 2019.

Americans for Campaign Reform
Brennan Center for Justice
Campaign Legal Center
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington
Common Cause

Democracy 21
Demos
League of Women Voters
Public Citizen
U.S PIRG