

books

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Reform laws re-shape state politics

Campaign Money: Reform and Reality in the States Herbert E. Alexander (ed.)
New York: The Free Press, 1976. 337 pages, \$10.95.

After one fund-raising affair for John Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign, the young candidate is said to have told its organizer to give the contributions in checks to his aide Ted Sorensen, but to give the cash ones to him personally. The organizer is reported to have replied, "It really doesn't make much difference whether you're running for President or city council, it all works the same, doesn't it?"

"Campaign Money" takes a close look at how "it all works" in the rough-and-tumble of state politics in the post-Watergate era.

Although the book recounts numerous instances of large contributions by special interest groups like bankers, building contractors, doctors, and labor unions (all of whom have more than an

idle curiosity in state regulations and expenditures), muckraking fans are apt to be disappointed by its sober analysis of a complicated problem for American politics.

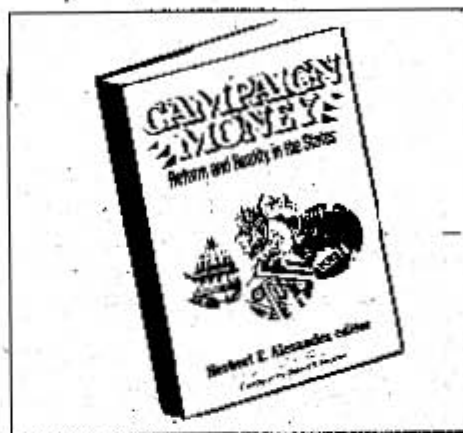
BY AIMING AT the state level, "Campaign Money" helps fill a gap in studies of campaign financing, which typically focus on politics at the national level.

Indeed, this study was conducted by the organization which has contributed the most to our understanding of money in politics—the Citizens' Research Foundation. Its director, Herbert E. Alexander, has himself accounted for much of our knowledge at the national level.

In this book, Alexander has collected studies on the financing of campaigns in ten states: California, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

All of the studies deal with the 1974 elections and almost all are limited to gubernatorial contests. However, some comment on races for other statewide offices and occasionally the U.S. Senate.

THESE TEN chapters were all written by professional newspaper reporters who covered the campaigns in their states. Thus the bulk of the book consists of journalistic accounts of office-seeking, fund-raising, and vote-getting during the first general election after Watergate. The candidates in 1974 had to contend with aroused public concern about money in politics and also had to



operate within new laws governing political campaigns.

In his introductory chapter, Alexander points out that 49 states between 1972 and 1974 enacted statutes to reform campaign practices. In varying ways and to various degrees, these reforms dealt with the disclosure of campaign contributions, limitations upon such contributions, and enforcement of violations.

None of the states discussed in the book provided for public financing, but all enacted campaign reform laws. The politics involved in passing these laws, their specific provisions, and their apparent effect upon the campaign are discussed in idiosyncratic detail in each chapter.

The authors make little effort to evaluate their own state's practices within any broader context, but the determined reader begins to draw certain conclu-

sions from the different experiences.

IF THE HEAVY dosage of names, organizations, rules, and figures in the state chapters obscure the more general lessons because of the tedium of detail, the last chapter by noted Washington Post reporter, David S. Broder, nicely summarizes the experiences and conclusions.

Many readers attracted to a book on campaign reform are apt to be surprised by the positions taken by Broder and Alexander on the role of political parties in campaign finance. Both are concerned over the weaknesses of the political parties in state as well as national campaigns.

Broder contends that funds should be channeled "through parties rather than directly to candidates", and Alexander says, "Ultimately, the way to get more accountability and responsibility in political finance would seem to be through democratically reformed, adequately funded political parties, not through increased candidate independence."

Perhaps because I believe in this prescription, which runs counter to most reformers' instincts, I find "Campaign Money" to be an important contribution to our understanding of campaign finances. It should be a challenge to those who think otherwise.

Editors' note: Kenneth Janda is a professor in the Department of Political Science.