

B A C K G R O U N D O F I N I T I A T I V E 2 7 6

The Coalition for Open Government was formed in June of 1971 after the legislature had again refused to pass strong legislation to require campaign contribution and expense disclosure. Several groups which had worked for this kind of legislation during past sessions called meetings to explore the possibility of writing an initiative. The resulting coalition included representatives from the League of Women Voters of Washington, the American Association of University Women, the Young Lawyers Section of the Seattle-King County Bar Association, the Municipal League of Seattle-King County, the Seattle Press Club, the Washington Environmental Council and both political parties. More recently, the Washington Council of Churches and CHECC on Seattle City Government have been represented, and the national organization, Common Cause, has supported and publicized the COG initiative.

During the summer, several public meetings were held to find solutions to the issues to be included in the initiative: Disclosure of campaign contributions and expenses, lobbyist disclosure, financial disclosure for elected officials, public access to government records, and open meetings. The open meetings section was subsequently dropped because legislation passed by the 1971 Legislative Session seemed adequate. Several drafts of the initiative were circulated among public officials, members of the organization in the Coalition, and to individuals who had expressed an interest pro or con. All comments were carefully considered by the Coalition in writing the final draft of the initiative.

The legislature, too, was given another opportunity to pass strong legislation. Bills substantially the same as the initiative were introduced in the 1972 Special Session, Coalition representatives and members of the organizations in the Coalition testified at hearings and contacted legislators to make their views known. Legislation on two parts of the initiative, campaign disclosure and lobbyist reporting, did pass, both so amended as to make them practically meaningless and both with referendum clauses. This tactic was no more than a blatant attempt to avoid disclosure during 1972 and deceive the voters. Since they will be on the ballot in November along with Initiative 276, it is important that voters know the weaknesses of Referendums 24 and 25 and the strengths of Initiative 276.

Public interest throughout the United States on these subjects is growing. Several other states are considering legislation, movements are beginning in many more, and the Coalition is receiving requests for information from both groups and individuals. Recent events both in this state and elsewhere, and the interest in campaign and financial disclosure in the presidential primaries show that it is essential that voters have the kinds of information which will be provided by passage of Initiative 276.