

TV star touts elections hearing

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Actor Sam Waterson is on Capitol Hill pushing a hearing on a bill which would promote a new campaign finance system based on small donations and government matching funds. Waterson is known for his work on NBC's "Law and Order." The bill has bipartisan backing in the House but starts its march to the Oval Office with only 70 sponsors.

Waterson recently took to the pages of the Boston Globe to discuss the issue, writing that the "wisdom of the people, on which democracy depends, can't be heard -- and we can't change the results we've been getting -- without changing the way we fund our elections. Simple, voter-centered public financing will take the taint out of campaign donations and invite ordinary citizens into the political process."

A bipartisan quartet of representatives is spearheading this bill, which gets a hearing today in the House Administration Committee. The group includes John Larson (D-CT), Walter Jones (R-NC), Chellie Pingree (D-ME), and Todd Platts (R-PA). It would give qualified candidates who agree to limit donations to \$100 per person matching funds to the tune of \$4-to-\$1.

Dick Durbin (D-IL) is shepherding the bill through the Senate.

Witnesses scheduled for the 11AM session do not include anybody representing the advertising community. Most are representatives with a sponsorship interest in the bill or are other government officials. What fireworks there are will likely come from conservative watchdog The CATO Institute and liberal watchdog Common Cause.

RBR/TVBR observation: It's hard to see this bill going anywhere, bipartisan or not. Members of both parties are simply too addicted to their massive political warchests. And even if a candidate is totally wedded to the concept behind this bill, all it will take is an opponent who does not agree to abide by the limits and the opt-in candidate will pretty much be forced to opt right back out or risk political extinction.

It will be a reunion of sorts for bill sponsor Pingree, who is among those testifying. So is a member of Common Cause, her former employer. And that's not all -- her daughter, Speaker of the House for the State of Maine Hannah Pingree, is also on the witness list.



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