Campaign Finance Reform

Historical Timeline

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**DATE EVENT DESCRIPTION**

1757 **George Washington** Washington was charged with a kind of campaign spending irregularity

in his race for a seat in the Virginia House of Burgesses. Said to have

purchased and distributed during the campaign more than a quart of

rum, beer, and hard cider per voter (391 voters in the district).

1828 **Kentucky Governor's Race** A Candidate solicited donations of $5,000 to $10,000.

1828 **Professional Campaign** Practice of Professional Campaign Managers begins.

1838 **New York Mayor's Race** Vote buying --- As much as $22 was being paid for an uncommitted

vote.

1864 **President Abraham Lincoln** Warns of "a crisis approaching" in a 21 November Letter… "As a result

of the war, corporations have become enthroned, and an era of

corruption in high places will follow. The money power of the country

will endeavor to prolong its rule by preying upon the prejudices of the

people until all wealth is concentrated in few hands and the Republic is

destroyed."

1867 **Naval Appropriations Bill** First federal effort to regulate campaign finance. Aimed to stop the

practice of shaking down naval yard workers of political donations.

1876 **The Golden Age of Boodle** Historian George Thayer nicknamed the era ( Gilded Age) filled with

political corruption, Tammy hall, Boss Tweed. Mark Twain "I think I

can say, and say with pride, that we have legislatures that bring high

prices than any in the world."

1883 **Civil Service Reform Act** aka Pendleton Act. Applied the Naval Appropriation Act to all

government workers.

1896 **Election** Watershed for Campaign Finance … set the record for expenditures,

unsurpassed for the next quarter century. McKinley = $7 million, Bryan

= $650,000…Marcus Alonzo Hanna, Ohio businessman and chairman

of the Republican national Committee, introduced the practice of

regularly assessing businesses for campaign contributions, and began the

practices of political advertising, regular press releases, speakers,

posters, buttons, and billboards. 300,000 flyers in 9 different languages.

1905 **President Roosevelt Calls** President Theodore Roosevelt argued for a ban on all political

**for Reform** contributions by corporations. Also proposed a public financing system

for all federal candidates.

1907 **Tillman Act** President Theodore Roosevelt called for public financing of federal

candidates via political parties and congress responded with the Act to

ban bank and corporate giving. The ban was largely ignored.

910 **Federal Corrupt Practices Act** First comprehensive reform measure. Established the first disclosure

requirements for federal candidates and limited the spending by House

and Senate candidates.

1913 **17th Amendment** Direct election of Senators. Expansion of the Electorate and importance

of the common voter to the overall process; thus, requiring more

campaign financing.

1920 **19th Amendment** Women's Suffrage. Expansion of the Electorate and importance of the

common voter to the overall process; thus, requiring more campaign

financing.

1924 **Democratic Party Campaign** The Party campaign plank sponsored by William Jennings Bryan, called

for federal candidates to be furnished "reasonable means of publicity at

public expense."

1925 **Amendment to Federal Corrupt** Served as the basic campaign finance act until 1971. Act was devoid of

**Practices Act** any enforcement procedures. Strengthen the disclosure requirements

and caps spending. President LBJ referred to the law as "more

loophole than law."

1935 **Hatch Act** Congress prohibited contributions to federal candidates from federal

workers and contractors and limited individual contributions to $5,000

per year.

1936 **Labor Contributions to** CIO president John L. Lewis contributes $500,000 to the Democratic

**Campaigns** Party.

1943 **Smith-Connally Act** Prohibited Labor Unions drom directly contributing money to federal

candidates.

1944 **CIO first PAC** In response to the Smith-Connally Act the CIO formed the first Political

Action committee (PAC) funded through voluntary contributions and

not union treasury funds.

1947 **Taft-Hartley Act** Permanent ban on contributions to federal candidates from unions,

corporations, and interstate banks.

1950 **Electronic Campaigning** Between 1956 and 1968 campaign spending doubles from $155 million

to over $300 million as outlays for broadcast media increased six fold,

from $10 million to $60 million.

1968 **Campaign Contributions** 8 percent of the voting population gave contributions to local, state, and

federal candidates.

1971 **FECA** Federal Elections Campaign Act - Congress passes the act to set limits on and require disclosure of spending by candidates for federal offices and provides for financing

for Presidential campaigns. Required full and timely disclosures, limited some contributions, capped spending, and permitted unions and corporations to form PACs.

1971 **Revenue Act** Established the public financing system for qualifying presidential

candidates paid for by the voluntary $1.00 check off on income tax

forms. Also provided $50.00 tax deduction for individual contributions

(ended 1978) or $12.50 tax credit9 raised to $50.00 in 1978 and

eliminated in 1986).

1972 **Watergate Election** President Richard Nixon's reelection committee received million of

dollars in secret. IE Robert Vesco ($200,000 in a briefcase), Howard

Hughes ($100,000 in a safe deposit box), Clement Stone ($2 million), 13

corporations $780,000 in illegal corporate contributions.

1974 **Federal Election Commission** FECA - After the Nixon Watergate scandal Congress creates the

commission to enforce the Federal Election Campaign Act provisions.

Create $1,000 individual contribution limit and a $5,000 PAC limit.

1976 **Buckley v. Valeo** 424 US 1 Supreme Court ruling that mandatory spending limits violate

free speech mandates.

1976 **FECA Amendments** Congress enacts new amendments to FECA to comply with Buckley v.

Valeo.

1978 **General Election Spending** General election totals equal $153.5 million.

1979 **FECA Amendments** Package of amendments to the election campaign act allows the use of

donations to political parties rather than candidates. First time Congress

enacted reform.

1980 **General Election Spending** General election spending totals $192.1 million.

1985 **FEC v. National Conservative** 470 US 480 NCPAC extended Buckley's ruling that independent

expenditures could not be limited.

1986 **Bills Killed** The US Senate votes twice in favor of strict controls for campaign

fundraising but bipartisan maneuvers do not allow the bills to come up

for a vote.

1986 **General Election Spending** General election Spending reaches $400.9 million.

1988 **General Election Spending** General Election Spending reaches $408.3 million.

1988 **Legislative and Legal Setbacks** A proposal for limiting overall Campaign spending by candidates is

shelved after a Republican Filibuster. A constitutional amendment to

override the Supreme Court decision fails to get off the ground.

1990 **Austin v. Michigan State** 494 US 652. Austin affirmed the constitutionality of a ban on campaign

**Chamber of Commerce** spending by business corporations or other corporations other than

purely non-profit.

1990 **General Election Spending** General Election Spending reaches $403.7 million.

1990 **More legislative Failure** The House and Senate approve voluntary spending limits and

restrictions on political action committees. Conferees fail to resolve

differences and bill never sent to President Bush.

1992 **Bush Vetoes Campaign** President Bush vetoed a bill providing partial public financing for

**Limits Bill** congressional candidates who abide by voluntary fund-raising ceilings

and baring soft money contributions to Presidential candidates. Senate

fails to override the veto.

1992 **Campaign Contributions** 4 percent of the voting population gave contributions to local, state, and

federal candidates. 80 percent of all congressional campaign money

donated by PACs and individuals giving $200 or more.

1992 **General Election Spending** General Election Spending reaches $528.6 million.

1994 **General Election Spending** General Election Spending reaches $616.2 million

1994 **More Bills Blocked** Republicans again block a bill setting spending limits and authorizing

partial public financing of congressional elections.

1996 **General Election Spending** General Election Spending reaches $650.8 million.

1996 **More Bills Fail** Bipartisan legislation for voluntary spending limits with rewards for

those who comply and baring soft money is killed by a Republican

filibuster.

1997 **Bill Fails** McCain- Feingold bipartisan bill to close soft money and TV advertising

expenditures runs afoul of a Republican filibuster. Senate sets March

1998 deadline for another vote on the bill.

1999 **Campaign Integrity Act** Asa Hutchinson (R - Arkansas) Bill to ban soft money and raise hard

**HR:1867** money limits.

1999 **Campaign Reform and Election** Sponsored by Rep. Bill Thomas (R - CA) includes a ban on foreign

**Integrity Act** money and reforms the FEC.

1999 **Citizen Legislature & Political** HR 1922 sponsored by Rep. John Doolittle (R - CA) to repeal all

**Freedom Act** federal election contribution limits and expedite and expand disclosure.

1999 **HR: 417 Campaign Reform Act** Shays-Meehan Bill, sponsored by Christopher Shays (R - CT) and

Martin Meehan (D - MA) to ban soft money and limit types of

campaign advertising.

2002 **Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act** Sponsored by Senators Russell Feingold (D-WI) and John McCain (R-AZ).

Revised some of the legal limits of expenditure set in 1974, and prohibited

unregulated contributions (called "soft money") to national political parties.

Also defined political ads as "electioneering communications" prohibiting any

such ad paid for by a corporation or paid for by an unincorporated entity using

any corporate or union funds

2003 **Supreme Court Upholds BCRA** A divided Supreme Court upholds the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, which

had been challenged by both parties. The decision preserved the soft money ban and restrictions on political ads, which were the most significant parts of the law.

2006 **U.S. Supreme Court Decision** Certain advertisements might be constitutionally entitled to an exception from the

**Right to Life v. FEC** electioneering communications' provisions of McCain-Feingold. The Court

established a broad exemption for any ad that could have a reasonable

interpretation as an ad about legislative issues.

2006 **Randall v. Sorrell** The Supreme Court of the United States ruled that Vermont's law, the strictest in the nation which placed a cap on financial donations made to politicians, unconstitutionally hindered the citizens' First Amendment right to free speech. A key issue in the case was the 1976 case Buckley v. Valeo, which many justices felt

needed to be revisited

2007 **BCRA Loosens** The Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision, ruled that advocacy groups financed by

unions or corporate money could not be barred from running ads in the month

before a primary and the two months preceding a general election. The court gave greater latitude to what an issue ad could say

2012 **Citizens United v. FEC** The [ruling](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/22/us/politics/22scotus.html) allows corporations and unions to advocate for or against candidates at

any time. Two months later, in Speechnow.org v. FEC, an appeals court strikes

down limits on contributions to independent-expenditure shops. The [super-PAC](http://www.opensecrets.org/resources/learn/glossary.php#Super%20PAC) is

born.