

U.S. Supreme Court
BUCKLEY v. VALEO, 424 U.S. 1 (1976)
424 U.S. 1

BUCKLEY ET AL. v. VALEO, SECRETARY OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE, ET AL.
APPEAL FROM THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA CIRCUIT.
No. 75-436.

Argued November 10, 1975.
Decided January 30, 1976. *

PER CURIAM.

These appeals present constitutional challenges to the key provisions of the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 (Act), and related provisions of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954, all as amended in 1974. 1 [424 U.S. 1, 7]

The Court of Appeals, in sustaining the legislation in large part against various constitutional challenges, 2 viewed it as "by far the most comprehensive reform legislation [ever] passed by Congress concerning the election of the President, Vice-President, and members of Congress." 171 U.S. App. D.C. 172, 182, 519 F.2d 821, 831 (1975). The statutes at issue summarized in broad terms, contain the following provisions: (a) individual political contributions are limited to \$1,000 to any single candidate per election, with an overall annual limitation of \$25,000 by any contributor; independent expenditures by individuals and groups "relative to a clearly identified candidate" are limited to \$1,000 a year; campaign spending by candidates for various federal offices and spending for national conventions by political parties are subject to prescribed limits; (b) contributions and expenditures above certain threshold levels must be reported and publicly disclosed; (c) a system for public funding of Presidential campaign activities is established by Subtitle H of the Internal Revenue Code; 3 and (d) a Federal Election Commission is established to administer and enforce the legislation.

This suit was originally filed by appellants in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia. Plaintiffs included a candidate for the Presidency of the United States, a United States Senator who is a candidate for re-election, a potential contributor, the [424 U.S. 1, 8] Committee for a Constitutional Presidency - McCarthy '76, the Conservative Party of the State of New York, the Mississippi Republican Party, the Libertarian Party, the New York Civil Liberties Union, Inc., the American Conservative Union, the Conservative Victory Fund, and Human Events, Inc. The defendants included the Secretary of the United States Senate and the Clerk of the United States House of Representatives, both in their official capacities and as ex officio members of the Federal Election Commission. The Commission itself was named as a defendant. Also named were the Attorney General of the United States and the Comptroller General of the United States.

Jurisdiction was asserted under 28 U.S.C. 1331, 2201, and 2202, and 315 (a) of the Act, 2 U.S.C. 437h (a) (1970 ed., Supp. IV). 4 The complaint sought both a [424 U.S. 1, 9] declaratory judgment that the major provisions of the Act were unconstitutional and an injunction against enforcement of those provisions. Appellants requested the convocation of a three-judge District Court as to all matters and also requested certification of constitutional questions to the Court of Appeals, pursuant to the terms of 315 (a). The District Judge denied the application for a three-judge court and directed that the case be transmitted to the Court of Appeals. That court entered an order stating that the case was "preliminarily deemed" to be properly certified under 315 (a). Leave to intervene was granted to various groups and individuals. 5 After considering matters regarding factfinding procedures, the Court of Appeals entered an order en banc remanding the case to the District Court to (1) identify the constitutional issues in the complaint; (2) take whatever evidence was found necessary in addition to the submissions suitably dealt with by way of judicial notice; (3) make findings of fact with reference to those issues; and (4) certify the constitutional questions arising from the foregoing steps to the Court of Appeals. 6 On remand, the District [424 U.S. 1, 10] Judge entered a memorandum order adopting extensive findings of fact and transmitting the augmented record back to the Court of Appeals.

On plenary review, a majority of the Court of Appeals rejected, for the most part, appellants' constitutional attacks. The court found "a clear and compelling interest," 171 U.S. App. D.C., at 192, 519 F.2d, at 841, in preserving the integrity of the electoral process. On that basis, the court upheld, with one exception, 7 the substantive provisions of the Act with respect to contributions, expenditures, and disclosure. It also sustained the constitutionality of the newly established Federal Election Commission. The court concluded that, notwithstanding the manner of selection of its members and the breadth of its powers, which included nonlegislative functions, the Commission is a constitutionally authorized agency created to perform primarily legislative functions. 8 [424 U.S. 1, 11] The provisions for public funding of the three stages of the Presidential selection process were upheld as a valid exercise of congressional power under the General Welfare Clause of the Constitution, Art. I, 8.

In this Court, appellants argue that the Court of Appeals failed to give this legislation the critical scrutiny demanded under accepted First Amendment and equal protection principles. In appellants' view, limiting the use of money for political purposes constitutes a restriction on communication violative of the First Amendment, since virtually all meaningful political communications in the modern setting involve the expenditure of money. Further, they argue that the reporting and disclosure provisions of the Act unconstitutionally impinge on their right to freedom of association. Appellants also view the federal subsidy provisions of Subtitle H as violative of the General Welfare Clause, and as inconsistent with the First and Fifth Amendments. Finally, appellants renew their attack on the Commission's composition and powers.

At the outset we must determine whether the case before us presents a "case or controversy" within the meaning of Art. III of the Constitution. Congress may not, of

course, require this Court to render opinions in matters which are not "cases or controversies." *Aetna Life Ins. Co. v. Haworth*, 300 U.S. 227, 240-241 (1937). We must therefore decide whether appellants have the "personal stake in the outcome of the controversy" necessary to meet the requirements of Art. III. *Baker v. Carr*, 369 U.S. 186, 204 (1962). It is clear that Congress, in enacting [424 U.S. 1, 12] 2 U.S.C. 437h (1970 ed., Supp. IV), 9 intended to provide judicial review to the extent permitted by Art. III. In our view, the complaint in this case demonstrates that at least some of the appellants have a sufficient "personal stake" 10 in a determination of the constitutional validity of each of the challenged provisions to present "a real and substantial controversy admitting of specific relief through a decree of a conclusive character, as distinguished from an opinion advising what the law would be upon a hypothetical state of facts." *Aetna Life Ins. Co. v. Haworth*, supra, at 241. 11

I. CONTRIBUTION AND EXPENDITURE LIMITATIONS

The intricate statutory scheme adopted by Congress to regulate federal election campaigns includes restrictions [424 U.S. 1, 13] on political contributions and expenditures that apply broadly to all phases of and all participants in the election process. The major contribution and expenditure limitations in the Act prohibit individuals from contributing more than \$25,000 in a single year or more than \$1,000 to any single candidate for an election campaign 12 and from spending more than \$1,000 a year "relative to a clearly identified candidate." 13 Other provisions restrict a candidate's use of personal and family resources in his campaign 14 and limit the overall amount that can be spent by a candidate in campaigning for federal office. 15

The constitutional power of Congress to regulate federal elections is well established and is not questioned by any of the parties in this case. 16 Thus, the critical constitutional [424 U.S. 1, 14] questions presented here go not to the basic power of Congress to legislate in this area, but to whether the specific legislation that Congress has enacted interferes with First Amendment freedoms or invidiously discriminates against nonincumbent candidates and minor parties in contravention of the Fifth Amendment.

A. General Principles

The Act's contribution and expenditure limitations operate in an area of the most fundamental First Amendment activities. Discussion of public issues and debate on the qualifications of candidates are integral to the operation of the system of government established by our Constitution. The First Amendment affords the broadest protection to such political expression in order "to assure [the] unfettered interchange of ideas for the bringing about of political and social changes desired by the people." *Roth v. United States*, 354 U.S. 476, 484 (1957). Although First Amendment protections are not confined to "the exposition of ideas," *Winters v. New York*, 333 U.S. 507, 510 (1948), "there is practically universal agreement that a major purpose of that Amendment was to protect the free discussion of governmental affairs, . . . of course includ[ing] discussions of candidates . . ." *Mills v. Alabama*, 384 U.S. 214, 218 (1966). This no

more than reflects our "profound national commitment to the principle that debate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide-open," *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*, 376 U.S. 254, 270 (1964). In a republic where the people are sovereign, the ability of the citizenry to make informed choices among candidates [424 U.S. 1, 15] for office is essential, for the identities of those who are elected will inevitably shape the course that we follow as a nation. As the Court observed in *Monitor Patriot Co. v. Roy*, 401 U.S. 265, 272 (1971), "it can hardly be doubted that the constitutional guarantee has its fullest and most urgent application precisely to the conduct of campaigns for political office."

The First Amendment protects political association as well as political expression. The constitutional right of association explicated in *NAACP v. Alabama*, 357 U.S. 449, 460 (1958), stemmed from the Court's recognition that "[e]ffective advocacy of both public and private points of view, particularly controversial ones, is undeniably enhanced by group association." Subsequent decisions have made clear that the First and Fourteenth Amendments guarantee "freedom to associate with others for the common advancement of political beliefs and ideas," a freedom that encompasses "[t]he right to associate with the political party of one's choice." *Kusper v. Pontikes*, 414 U.S. 51, 56, 57 (1973), quoted in *Cousins v. Wigoda*, 419 U.S. 477, 487 (1975).

It is with these principles in mind that we consider the primary contentions of the parties with respect to the Act's limitations upon the giving and spending of money in political campaigns. Those conflicting contentions could not more sharply define the basic issues before us. Appellees contend that what the Act regulates is conduct, and that its effect on speech and association is incidental at most. Appellants respond that contributions and expenditures are at the very core of political speech, and that the Act's limitations thus constitute restraints on First Amendment liberty that are both gross and direct.

In upholding the constitutional validity of the Act's contribution and expenditure provisions on the ground [424 U.S. 1, 16] that those provisions should be viewed as regulating conduct, not speech, the Court of Appeals relied upon *United States v. O'Brien*, 391 U.S. 367 (1968). See 171 U.S. App. D.C., at 191, 519 F.2d, at 840. The *O'Brien* case involved a defendant's claim that the First Amendment prohibited his prosecution for burning his draft card because his act was "symbolic speech" engaged in as a "demonstration against the war and against the draft." 391 U.S., at 376. On the assumption that "the alleged communicative element in *O'Brien's* conduct [was] sufficient to bring into play the First Amendment," the Court sustained the conviction because it found "a sufficiently important governmental interest in regulating the non-speech element" that was "unrelated to the suppression of free expression" and that had an "incidental restriction on alleged First Amendment freedoms . . . no greater than [was] essential to the furtherance of that interest." *Id.*, at 376-377. The Court expressly emphasized that *O'Brien* was not a case "where the alleged governmental interest in regulating conduct arises in some measure because the communication allegedly integral to the conduct is itself thought to be harmful." *Id.*, at 382.

We cannot share the view that the present Act's contribution and expenditure limitations are comparable to the restrictions on conduct upheld in *O'Brien*. The expenditure of money simply cannot be equated with such conduct as destruction of a draft card. Some forms of communication made possible by the giving and spending of money involve speech alone, some involve conduct primarily, and some involve a combination of the two. Yet this Court has never suggested that the dependence of a communication on the expenditure of money operates itself to introduce a non speech element or to reduce the exacting scrutiny required by the First Amendment. See *Bigelow v. Virginia*, 421 U.S. 809 , [424 U.S. 1, 17] 820 (1975); *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*, supra, at 266. For example, in *Cox v. Louisiana*, 379 U.S. 559 (1965), the Court contrasted picketing and parading with a newspaper comment and a telegram by a citizen to a public official. The parading and picketing activities were said to constitute conduct "intertwined with expression and association," whereas the newspaper comment and the telegram were described as a "pure form of expression" involving "free speech alone" rather than "expression mixed with particular conduct." *Id.*, at 563-564.

Even if the categorization of the expenditure of money as conduct were accepted, the limitations challenged here would not meet the *O'Brien* test because the governmental interests advanced in support of the Act involve "suppressing communication." The interests served by the Act include restricting the voices of people and interest groups who have money to spend and reducing the overall scope of federal election campaigns. Although the Act does not focus on the ideas expressed by persons or groups subject to its regulations, it is aimed in part at equalizing the relative ability of all voters to affect electoral outcomes by placing a ceiling on expenditures for political expression by citizens and groups. Unlike *O'Brien*, where the Selective Service System's administrative interest in the preservation of draft cards was wholly unrelated to their use as a means of communication, it is beyond dispute that the interest in regulating the alleged "conduct" of giving or spending money "arises in some measure because the communication allegedly integral to the conduct is itself thought to be harmful." 391 U.S., at 382 .

Nor can the Act's contribution and expenditure limitations be sustained, as some of the parties suggest, by reference to the constitutional principles reflected in such [424 U.S. 1, 18] decisions as *Cox v. Louisiana*, supra; *Adderley v. Florida*, 385 U.S. 39 (1966); and *Kovacs v. Cooper*, 336 U.S. 77 (1949). Those cases stand for the proposition that the government may adopt reasonable time, place, and manner regulations, which do not discriminate among speakers or ideas, in order to further an important governmental interest unrelated to the restriction of communication. See *Erznoznik v. City of Jacksonville*, 422 U.S. 205, 209 (1975). In contrast to *O'Brien*, where the method of expression was held to be subject to prohibition, *Cox*, *Adderley*, and *Kovacs* involved place or manner restrictions on legitimate modes of expression - picketing, parading, demonstrating, and using a soundtrack. The critical difference between this case and those time, place, and manner cases is that the present Act's contribution and expenditure limitations impose direct quantity restrictions on political communication and association by persons, groups, candidates, and political parties in addition to any

reasonable time, place, and manner regulations otherwise imposed. 17 [424 U.S. 1, 19]

A restriction on the amount of money a person or group can spend on political communication during a campaign necessarily reduces the quantity of expression by restricting the number of issues discussed, the depth of their exploration, and the size of the audience reached. 18 This is because virtually every means of communicating ideas in today's mass society requires the expenditure of money. The distribution of the humblest handbill or leaflet entails printing, paper, and circulation costs. Speeches and rallies generally necessitate hiring a hall and publicizing the event. The electorate's increasing dependence on television, radio, and other mass media for news and information has made these expensive modes of communication indispensable instruments of effective political speech.

The expenditure limitations contained in the Act represent substantial rather than merely theoretical restraints on the quantity and diversity of political speech. The \$1,000 ceiling on spending "relative to a clearly identified candidate," 18 U.S.C. 608 (e) (1) (1970 ed., Supp. IV), would appear to exclude all citizens and groups except candidates, political parties, and the institutional press 19 from any significant use of the most [424 U.S. 1, 20] effective modes of communication. 20 Although the Act's limitations on expenditures by campaign organizations and political parties provide substantially greater room for discussion and debate, they would have required restrictions in the scope of a number of past congressional and Presidential campaigns 21 and would operate to constrain campaigning by candidates who raise sums in excess of the spending ceiling.

By contrast with a limitation upon expenditures for political expression, a limitation upon the amount that any one person or group may contribute to a candidate or political committee entails only a marginal restriction upon the contributor's ability to engage in free communication. [424 U.S. 1, 21] A contribution serves as a general expression of support for the candidate and his views, but does not communicate the underlying basis for the support. The quantity of communication by the contributor does not increase perceptibly with the size of his contribution, since the expression rests solely on the undifferentiated, symbolic act of contributing. At most, the size of the contribution provides a very rough index of the intensity of the contributor's support for the candidate. 22 A limitation on the amount of money a person may give to a candidate or campaign organization thus involves little direct restraint on his political communication, for it permits the symbolic expression of support evidenced by a contribution but does not in any way infringe the contributor's freedom to discuss candidates and issues. While contributions may result in political expression if spent by a candidate or an association to present views to the voters, the transformation of contributions into political debate involves speech by someone other than the contributor.

Given the important role of contributions in financing political campaigns, contribution restrictions could have a severe impact on political dialogue if the limitations prevented candidates and political committees from amassing the resources necessary for

effective advocacy. There is no indication, however, that the contribution limitations imposed by the Act would have any dramatic adverse effect on the funding of campaigns and political associations. 23 The overall effect of the Act's contribution [424 U.S. 1, 22] ceilings is merely to require candidates and political committees to raise funds from a greater number of persons and to compel people who would otherwise contribute amounts greater than the statutory limits to expend such funds on direct political expression, rather than to reduce the total amount of money potentially available to promote political expression.

The Act's contribution and expenditure limitations also impinge on protected associational freedoms. Making a contribution, like joining a political party, serves to affiliate a person with a candidate. In addition, it enables like-minded persons to pool their resources in furtherance of common political goals. The Act's contribution ceilings thus limit one important means of associating with a candidate or committee, but leave the contributor free to become a member of any political association and to assist personally in the association's efforts on behalf of candidates. And the Act's contribution limitations permit associations and candidates to aggregate large sums of money to promote effective advocacy. By contrast, the Act's \$1,000 limitation on independent expenditures "relative to a clearly identified candidate" precludes most associations from effectively amplifying the voice of their adherents, the original basis for the recognition of First Amendment protection of the freedom of association. See *NAACP v. Alabama*, 357 U.S., at 460. The Act's constraints on the ability of independent associations and candidate campaign organizations to expend resources on political expression "is simultaneously an interference with the freedom of [their] adherents," *Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, 354 U.S. 234, 250 (1957) (plurality opinion). See *Cousins v. Wigoda*, 419 U.S., at 487 -488; *NAACP v. Button*, 371 U.S. 415, 431 (1963).

In sum, although the Act's contribution and expenditure limitations both implicate fundamental First Amendment interests, its expenditure ceilings impose significantly more severe restrictions on protected freedoms of political expression and association than do its limitations on financial contributions.

B. Contribution Limitations

1. The \$1,000 Limitation on Contributions by Individuals and Groups to Candidates and Authorized Campaign Committees

Section 608 (b) provides, with certain limited exceptions, that "no person shall make contributions to any candidate with respect to any election for Federal office which, in the aggregate, exceed \$1,000." The statute defines "person" broadly to include "an individual, partnership, committee, association, corporation or any other organization or group of persons." 591 (g). The limitation reaches a gift, subscription, loan, advance, deposit of anything of value, or promise to give a contribution, made for the purpose of influencing a primary election, a Presidential preference primary, or a general election for any federal office. 24 591 (e) (1), (2). The [424 U.S. 1, 24] \$1,000 ceiling applies

regardless of whether the contribution is given to the candidate, to a committee authorized in writing by the candidate to accept contributions on his behalf, or indirectly via earmarked gifts passed through an intermediary to the candidate. 608 (b) (4), (6). 25 The restriction applies to aggregate amounts contributed to the candidate for each election - with primaries, runoff elections, and general elections counted separately, and all Presidential primaries held in any calendar year treated together as a single election campaign. 608 (b) (5).

Appellants contend that the \$1,000 contribution ceiling unjustifiably burdens First Amendment freedoms, employs overbroad dollar limits, and discriminates against candidates opposing incumbent officeholders and against minor-party candidates in violation of the Fifth Amendment. We address each of these claims of invalidity in turn.

(a)

As the general discussion in Part I-A, *supra*, indicated, the primary First Amendment problem raised by the Act's contribution limitations is their restriction of one aspect of the contributor's freedom of political association. [424 U.S. 1, 25] The Court's decisions involving associational freedoms establish that the right of association is a "basic constitutional freedom," *Kusper v. Pontikes*, 414 U.S., at 57, that is "closely allied to freedom of speech and a right which, like free speech, lies at the foundation of a free society." *Shelton v. Tucker*, 364 U.S. 479, 486 (1960). See, e. g., *Bates v. Little Rock*, 361 U.S. 516, 522 -523 (1960); *NAACP v. Alabama*, *supra*, at 460-461; *NAACP v. Button*, *supra*, at 452 (Harlan, J., dissenting). In view of the fundamental nature of the right to associate, governmental "action which may have the effect of curtailing the freedom to associate is subject to the closest scrutiny." *NAACP v. Alabama*, *supra*, at 460-461. Yet, it is clear that "[n]either the right to associate nor the right to participate in political activities is absolute." *CSC v. Letter Carriers*, 413 U.S. 548, 567 (1973). Even a "significant interference" with protected rights of political association may be sustained if the State demonstrates a sufficiently important interest and employs means closely drawn to avoid unnecessary abridgment of associational freedoms. *Cousins v. Wigoda*, *supra*, at 488; *NAACP v. Button*, *supra*, at 438; *Shelton v. Tucker*, *supra*, at 488.

Appellees argue that the Act's restrictions on large campaign contributions are justified by three governmental interests. According to the parties and amici, the primary interest served by the limitations and, indeed, by the Act as a whole, is the prevention of corruption and the appearance of corruption spawned by the real or imagined coercive influence of large financial contributions on candidates' positions and on their actions if elected to office. Two "ancillary" interests underlying the Act are also allegedly furthered by the \$1,000 limits on contributions. First, the limits serve to mute the voices of affluent persons and groups in the election [424 U.S. 1, 26] process and thereby to equalize the relative ability of all citizens to affect the outcome of elections. 26 Second, it is argued, the ceilings may to some extent act as a brake on the skyrocketing cost of political campaigns and thereby serve to open the political system more widely to candidates without access to sources of large amounts of money. 27

It is unnecessary to look beyond the Act's primary purpose - to limit the actuality and appearance of corruption resulting from large individual financial contributions - in order to find a constitutionally sufficient justification for the \$1,000 contribution limitation. Under a system of private financing of elections, a candidate lacking immense personal or family wealth must depend on financial contributions from others to provide the resources necessary to conduct a successful campaign. The increasing importance of the communications media and sophisticated mass-mailing and polling operations to effective campaigning make the raising of large sums of money an ever more essential ingredient of an effective candidacy. To the extent that large contributions are given to secure a political quid pro quo from current and potential office holders, the integrity of our system of [424 U.S. 1, 27] representative democracy is undermined. Although the scope of such pernicious practices can never be reliably ascertained, the deeply disturbing examples surfacing after the 1972 election demonstrate that the problem is not an illusory one. 28

Of almost equal concern as the danger of actual quid pro quo arrangements is the impact of the appearance of corruption stemming from public awareness of the opportunities for abuse inherent in a regime of large individual financial contributions. In *CSC v. Letter Carriers*, supra, the Court found that the danger to "fair and effective government" posed by partisan political conduct on the part of federal employees charged with administering the law was a sufficiently important concern to justify broad restrictions on the employees' right of partisan political association. Here, as there, Congress could legitimately conclude that the avoidance of the appearance of improper influence "is also critical . . . if confidence in the system of representative Government is not to be eroded to a disastrous extent." 413 U.S., at 565 . 29

Appellants contend that the contribution limitations must be invalidated because bribery laws and narrowly drawn disclosure requirements constitute a less restrictive means of dealing with "proven and suspected quid pro quo arrangements." But laws making criminal [424 U.S. 1, 28] the giving and taking of bribes deal with only the most blatant and specific attempts of those with money to influence governmental action. And while disclosure requirements serve the many salutary purposes discussed elsewhere in this opinion, 30 Congress was surely entitled to conclude that disclosure was only a partial measure, and that contribution ceilings were a necessary legislative concomitant to deal with the reality or appearance of corruption inherent in a system permitting unlimited financial contributions, even when the identities of the contributors and the amounts of their contributions are fully disclosed.

The Act's \$1,000 contribution limitation focuses precisely on the problem of large campaign contributions - the narrow aspect of political association where the actuality and potential for corruption have been identified - while leaving persons free to engage in independent political expression, to associate actively through volunteering their services, and to assist to a limited but nonetheless substantial extent in supporting candidates and committees with financial resources. 31 Significantly, the [424 U.S. 1, 29] Act's contribution limitations in themselves do not undermine to any material degree the potential for robust and effective discussion of candidates and campaign

issues by individual citizens, associations, the institutional press, candidates, and political parties.

We find that, under the rigorous standard of review established by our prior decisions, the weighty interests served by restricting the size of financial contributions to political candidates are sufficient to justify the limited effect upon First Amendment freedoms caused by the \$1,000 contribution ceiling.

(b)

Appellants' first overbreadth challenge to the contribution ceilings rests on the proposition that most large contributors do not seek improper influence over a candidate's position or an officeholder's action. Although the truth of that proposition may be assumed, it does not [424 U.S. 1, 30] undercut the validity of the \$1,000 contribution limitation. Not only is it difficult to isolate suspect contributions but, more importantly, Congress was justified in concluding that the interest in safeguarding against the appearance of impropriety requires that the opportunity for abuse inherent in the process of raising large monetary contributions be eliminated.

A second, related overbreadth claim is that the \$1,000 restriction is unrealistically low because much more than that amount would still not be enough to enable an unscrupulous contributor to exercise improper influence over a candidate or officeholder, especially in campaigns for statewide or national office. While the contribution limitation provisions might well have been structured to take account of the graduated expenditure limitations for congressional and Presidential campaigns, 32 Congress' failure to engage in such fine tuning does not invalidate the legislation. As the Court of Appeals observed, "[i]f it is satisfied that some limit on contributions is necessary, a court has no scalpel to probe, whether, say, a \$2,000 ceiling might not serve as well as \$1,000." 171 U.S. App. D.C., at 193, 519 F.2d, at 842. Such distinctions in degree become significant only when they can be said to amount to differences in kind. Compare *Kusper v. Pontikes*, 414 U.S. 51 (1973), with *Rosario v. Rockefeller*, 410 U.S. 752 (1973).

(c)

Apart from these First Amendment concerns, appellants argue that the contribution limitations work such an invidious discrimination between incumbents [424 U.S. 1, 31] and challengers that the statutory provisions must be declared unconstitutional on their face. 33 In considering this contention, it is important at the outset to note that the Act applies the same limitations on contributions to all candidates regardless of their present occupations, ideological views, or party affiliations. Absent record evidence of invidious discrimination against challengers as a class, a court should generally be hesitant to invalidate legislation which on its face imposes evenhanded restrictions. Cf. *James v. Valtierra*, 402 U.S. 137 (1971). [424 U.S. 1, 32]

There is no such evidence to support the claim that the contribution limitations in themselves discriminate against major-party challengers to incumbents. Challengers can and often do defeat incumbents in federal elections. 34 Major-party challengers in federal elections are usually men and women who are well known and influential in their community or State. Often such challengers are themselves incumbents in important local, state, or federal offices. Statistics in the record indicate that major-party challengers as well as incumbents are capable of raising large sums for campaigning. 35 Indeed, a small but nonetheless significant number of challengers have in recent elections outspent their incumbent rivals. 36 And, to the extent that incumbents generally are more likely than challengers to attract very large contributions, the Act's \$1,000 ceiling has the practical effect of benefiting challengers as a class. 37 Contrary to the broad generalization [424 U.S. 1, 33] drawn by the appellants, the practical impact of the contribution ceilings in any given election will clearly depend upon the amounts in excess of the ceilings that, for various reasons, the candidates in that election would otherwise have received and the utility of these additional amounts to the candidates. To be sure, the limitations may have a significant effect on particular challengers or incumbents, but the record provides no basis for predicting that such adventitious factors will invariably and invidiously benefit incumbents as a class. 38 Since the danger of corruption and the appearance of corruption apply with equal force to challengers and to incumbents, Congress had ample justification for imposing the same fundraising constraints upon both.

The charge of discrimination against minor-party and independent candidates is more troubling, but the record provides no basis for concluding that the Act invidiously disadvantages such candidates. As noted above, the Act on its face treats all candidates equally with regard to contribution limitations. And the restriction would appear to benefit minor-party and independent candidates relative to their major-party opponents because major-party candidates receive far more money in large contributions. 39 Although there is some [424 U.S. 1, 34] force to appellants' response that minor-party candidates are primarily concerned with their ability to amass the resources necessary to reach the electorate rather than with their funding position relative to their major-party opponents, the record is virtually devoid of support for the claim that the \$1,000 contribution limitation will have a serious effect on the initiation and scope of minor-party and independent candidacies. 40 Moreover, any attempt [424 U.S. 1, 35] to exclude minor parties and independents en masse from the Act's contribution limitations overlooks the fact that minor-party candidates may win elective office or have a substantial impact on the outcome of an election. 41

In view of these considerations, we conclude that the impact of the Act's \$1,000 contribution limitation on major-party challengers and on minor-party candidates does not render the provision unconstitutional on its face.

2. The \$5,000 Limitation on Contributions by Political Committees

Section 608 (b) (2) permits certain committees, designated as "political committees," to contribute up to \$5,000 to any candidate with respect to any election for federal office.

In order to qualify for the higher contribution ceiling, a group must have been registered with the Commission as a political committee under 2 U.S.C. 433 (1970 ed., Supp. IV) for not less than six months, have received contributions from more than 50 persons, and, except for state political party organizations, have contributed to five or more candidates for federal office. Appellants argue that these qualifications unconstitutionally discriminate against ad hoc organizations in favor of established interest groups and impermissibly burden free association. The argument is without merit. Rather than undermining freedom of association, the basic provision enhances the opportunity of bona fide groups to participate in the election process, and the registration, contribution, and candidate conditions serve the permissible purpose of preventing individuals [424 U.S. 1, 36] from evading the applicable contribution limitations by labeling themselves committees.

3. Limitations on Volunteers' Incidental Expenses

The Act excludes from the definition of contribution "the value of services provided without compensation by individuals who volunteer a portion or all of their time on behalf of a candidate or political committee." 591 (e) (5) (A). Certain expenses incurred by persons in providing volunteer services to a candidate are exempt from the \$1,000 ceiling only to the extent that they do not exceed \$500. These expenses are expressly limited to (1) "the use of real or personal property and the cost of invitations, food, and beverages, voluntarily provided by an individual to a candidate in rendering voluntary personal services on the individual's residential premises for candidate-related activities." 591 (e) (5) (B); (2) "the sale of any food or beverage by a vendor for use in a candidate's campaign at a charge [at least equal to cost but] less than the normal comparable charge," 591 (e) (5) (C); and (3) "any unreimbursed payment for travel expenses made by an individual who on his own behalf volunteers his personal services to a candidate," 591 (e) (5) (D).

If, as we have held, the basic contribution limitations are constitutionally valid, then surely these provisions are a constitutionally acceptable accommodation of Congress' valid interest in encouraging citizen participation in political campaigns while continuing to guard against the corrupting potential of large financial contributions to candidates. The expenditure of resources at the candidate's direction for a fundraising event at a volunteer's residence or the provision of in-kind assistance in the form of food or beverages to be resold to raise funds or consumed by the participants in such an event provides material financial assistance to a candidate. The ultimate [424 U.S. 1, 37] effect is the same as if the person had contributed the dollar amount to the candidate and the candidate had then used the contribution to pay for the fundraising event or the food. Similarly, travel undertaken as a volunteer at the direction of the candidate or his staff is an expense of the campaign and may properly be viewed as a contribution if the volunteer absorbs the fare. Treating these expenses as contributions when made to the candidate's campaign or at the direction of the candidate or his staff forecloses an avenue of abuse 42 without limiting actions voluntarily undertaken by citizens independently of a candidate's campaign. 43 [424 U.S. 1, 38]

4. The \$25,000 Limitation on Total Contributions During any Calendar Year

In addition to the \$1,000 limitation on the nonexempt contributions that an individual may make to a particular candidate for any single election, the Act contains an overall \$25,000 limitation on total contributions by an individual during any calendar year. 608 (b) (3). A contribution made in connection with an election is considered, for purposes of this subsection, to be made in the year the election is held. Although the constitutionality of this provision was drawn into question by appellants, it has not been separately addressed at length by the parties. The overall \$25,000 ceiling does impose an ultimate restriction upon the number of candidates and committees with which an individual may associate himself by means of financial support. But this quite modest restraint upon protected political activity serves to prevent evasion of the \$1,000 contribution limitation by a person who might otherwise contribute massive amounts of money to a particular candidate through the use of unearmarked contributions to political committees likely to contribute to that candidate, or huge contributions to the candidate's political party. The limited, additional restriction on associational freedom imposed by the overall ceiling is thus no more than a corollary of the basic individual contribution limitation that we have found to be constitutionally valid. [424 U.S. 1, 39]

C. Expenditure Limitations

The Act's expenditure ceilings impose direct and substantial restraints on the quantity of political speech. The most drastic of the limitations restricts individuals and groups, including political parties that fail to place a candidate on the ballot, 44 to an expenditure of \$1,000 "relative to a clearly identified candidate during a calendar year." 608 (e) (1). Other expenditure ceilings limit spending by candidates, 608 (a), their campaigns, 608 (c), and political parties in connection with election campaigns, 608 (f). It is clear that a primary effect of these expenditure limitations is to restrict the quantity of campaign speech by individuals, groups, and candidates. The restrictions, while neutral as to the ideas expressed, limit political expression "at the core of our electoral process and of the First Amendment freedoms." *Williams v. Rhodes*, 393 U.S. 23, 32 (1968).

1. The \$1,000 Limitation on Expenditures "Relative to a Clearly Identified Candidate"

Section 608 (e) (1) provides that "[n]o person may make any expenditure . . . relative to a clearly identified candidate during a calendar year which, when added to all other expenditures made by such person during the year advocating the election or defeat of such candidate, exceeds \$1,000." 45 The plain effect of 608 (e) (1) is to [424 U.S. 1, 40] prohibit all individuals, who are neither candidates nor owners of institutional press facilities, and all groups, except political parties and campaign organizations, from voicing their views "relative to a clearly identified candidate" through means that entail aggregate expenditures of more than \$1,000 during a calendar year. The provision, for example, would make it a federal criminal offense for a person or association to place a single one-quarter page advertisement "relative to a clearly identified candidate" in a major metropolitan newspaper. 46

Before examining the interests advanced in support of 608 (e) (1)'s expenditure ceiling, consideration must be given to appellants' contention that the provision is unconstitutionally vague. 47 Close examination of the [424 U.S. 1, 41] specificity of the statutory limitation is required where, as here, the legislation imposes criminal penalties in an area permeated by First Amendment interests. See *Smith v. Goguen*, 415 U.S. 566, 573 (1974); *Cramp v. Board of Public Instruction*, 368 U.S. 278, 287 -288 (1961); *Smith v. California*, 361 U.S. 147, 151 (1959). 48 The test is whether the language of 608 (e) (1) affords the "[p]recision of regulation [that] must be the touchstone in an area so closely touching our most precious freedoms." *NAACP v. Button*, 371 U.S., at 438 .

The key operative language of the provision limits "any expenditure . . . relative to a clearly identified candidate." Although "expenditure," "clearly identified," and "candidate" are defined in the Act, there is no definition clarifying what expenditures are "relative to" a candidate. The use of so indefinite a phrase as "relative to" a candidate fails to clearly mark the boundary between permissible and impermissible speech, unless other portions of 608 (e) (1) make sufficiently explicit the range of expenditures [424 U.S. 1, 42] covered by the limitation. The section prohibits "any expenditure . . . relative to a clearly identified candidate during a calendar year which, when added to all other expenditures . . . advocating the election or defeat of such candidate, exceeds \$1,000." (Emphasis added.) This context clearly permits, if indeed it does not require, the phrase "relative to" a candidate to be read to mean "advocating the election or defeat of" a candidate. 49

But while such a construction of 608 (e) (1) refocuses the vagueness question, the Court of Appeals was mistaken in thinking that this construction eliminates the problem of unconstitutional vagueness altogether. 171 U.S. App. D.C., at 204, 519 F.2d, at 853. For the distinction between discussion of issues and candidates and advocacy of election or defeat of candidates may often dissolve in practical application. Candidates, especially incumbents, are intimately tied to public issues involving legislative proposals and governmental actions. Not only do candidates campaign on the basis of their positions on various public issues, but campaigns themselves generate issues of public interest. 50 In an analogous [424 U.S. 1, 43] context, this Court in *Thomas v. Collins*, 323 U.S. 516 (1945), observed:

"[W]hether words intended and designed to fall short of invitation would miss that mark is a question both of intent and of effect. No speaker, in such circumstances, safely could assume that anything he might say upon the general subject would not be understood by some as an invitation. In short, the supposedly clear-cut distinction between discussion, laudation, general advocacy, and solicitation puts the speaker in these circumstances wholly at the mercy of the varied understanding of his hearers and consequently of whatever inference may be drawn as to his intent and meaning.

"Such a distinction offers no security for free discussion. In these conditions it blankets with uncertainty whatever may be said. It compels the speaker to hedge and trim." *Id.*, at 535.

See also *United States v. Auto. Workers*, 352 U.S. 567, 595 -596 (1957) (Douglas, J., dissenting); *Gitlow v. New York*, 268 U.S. 652, 673 (1925) (Holmes, J., dissenting).

The constitutional deficiencies described in *Thomas v. Collins* can be avoided only by reading 608 (e) (1) as limited to communications that include explicit words of advocacy of election or defeat of a candidate, much as the definition of "clearly identified" in 608 (e) (2) requires that an explicit and unambiguous reference to the candidate appear as part of the communication. 51 This [424 U.S. 1, 44] is the reading of the provision suggested by the non-governmental appellees in arguing that "[f]unds spent to propagate one's views on issues without expressly calling for a candidate's election or defeat are thus not covered." We agree that in order to preserve the provision against invalidation on vagueness grounds, 608 (e) (1) must be construed to apply only to expenditures for communications that in express terms advocate the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate for federal office. 52

We turn then to the basic First Amendment question - whether 608 (e) (1), even as thus narrowly and explicitly construed, impermissibly burdens the constitutional right of free expression. The Court of Appeals summarily held the provision constitutionally valid on the ground that "section 608 (e) is a loophole-closing provision only" that is necessary to prevent circumvention of the contribution limitations. 171 U.S. App. D.C., at 204, 519 F.2d, at 853. We cannot agree.

The discussion in Part I-A, *supra*, explains why the Act's expenditure limitations impose far greater restraints on the freedom of speech and association than do its contribution limitations. The markedly greater burden on basic freedoms caused by 608 (e) (1) thus cannot be sustained simply by invoking the interest in maximizing the effectiveness of the less intrusive contribution limitations. Rather, the constitutionality of 608 (e) (1) turns on whether the governmental interests advanced in its support satisfy the exacting scrutiny applicable to limitations [424 U.S. 1, 45] on core First Amendment rights of political expression.

We find that the governmental interest in preventing corruption and the appearance of corruption is inadequate to justify 608 (e) (1)'s ceiling on independent expenditures. First, assuming, *arguendo*, that large independent expenditures pose the same dangers of actual or apparent *quid pro quo* arrangements as do large contributions, 608 (e) (1) does not provide an answer that sufficiently relates to the elimination of those dangers. Unlike the contribution limitations' total ban on the giving of large amounts of money to candidates, 608 (e) (1) prevents only some large expenditures. So long as persons and groups eschew expenditures that in express terms advocate the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate, they are free to spend as much as they want to promote the candidate and his views. The exacting interpretation of the statutory language necessary to avoid unconstitutional vagueness thus undermines the limitation's effectiveness as a loophole-closing provision by facilitating circumvention by those seeking to exert improper influence upon a candidate or office-holder. It would naively underestimate the ingenuity and resourcefulness of persons and groups desiring to buy influence to believe that they would have much difficulty devising expenditures that

skirted the restriction on express advocacy of election or defeat but nevertheless benefited the candidate's campaign. Yet no substantial societal interest would be served by a loophole-closing provision designed to check corruption that permitted unscrupulous persons and organizations to expend unlimited sums of money in order to obtain improper influence over candidates for elective office. Cf. *Mills v. Alabama*, 384 U.S., at 220 .

Second, quite apart from the shortcomings of 608 (e) [424 U.S. 1, 46] (1) in preventing any abuses generated by large independent expenditures, the independent advocacy restricted by the provision does not presently appear to pose dangers of real or apparent corruption comparable to those identified with large campaign contributions. The parties defending 608 (e) (1) contend that it is necessary to prevent would-be contributors from avoiding the contribution limitations by the simple expedient of paying directly for media advertisements or for other portions of the candidate's campaign activities. They argue that expenditures controlled by or coordinated with the candidate and his campaign might well have virtually the same value to the candidate as a contribution and would pose similar dangers of abuse. Yet such controlled or coordinated expenditures are treated as contributions rather than expenditures under the Act. 53 Section 608 (b)'s [424 U.S. 1, 47] contribution ceilings rather than 608 (e) (1)'s independent expenditure limitation prevent attempts to circumvent the Act through prearranged or coordinated expenditures amounting to disguised contributions. By contrast, 608 (e) (1) limits expenditures for express advocacy of candidates made totally independently of the candidate and his campaign. Unlike contributions, such independent expenditures may well provide little assistance to the candidate's campaign and indeed may prove counterproductive. The absence of prearrangement and coordination of an expenditure with the candidate or his agent not only undermines the value of the expenditure to the candidate, but also alleviates the danger that expenditures will be given as a quid pro quo for improper commitments from the candidate. Rather than preventing circumvention of the contribution limitations, 608 (e) (1) severely restricts all independent advocacy despite its substantially diminished potential for abuse.

While the independent expenditure ceiling thus fails to serve any substantial governmental interest in stemming [424 U.S. 1, 48] the reality or appearance of corruption in the electoral process, it heavily burdens core First Amendment expression. For the First Amendment right to "speak one's mind . . . on all public institutions" includes the right to engage in "vigorous advocacy" no less than "abstract discussion." *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*, 376 U.S., at 269 , quoting *Bridges v. California*, 314 U.S. 252, 270 (1941), and *NAACP v. Button*, 371 U.S., at 429 . Advocacy of the election or defeat of candidates for federal office is no less entitled to protection under the First Amendment than the discussion of political policy generally or advocacy of the passage or defeat of legislation. 54

It is argued, however, that the ancillary governmental interest in equalizing the relative ability of individuals and groups to influence the outcome of elections serves to justify the limitation on express advocacy of the election or defeat of candidates imposed by

608 (e) (1)'s expenditure ceiling. But the concept that government may restrict the speech of some elements of our society in [424 U.S. 1, 49] order to enhance the relative voice of others is wholly foreign to the First Amendment, which was designed "to secure `the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources,'" and "'to assure unfettered interchange of ideas for the bringing about of political and social changes desired by the people.'" *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*, supra, at 266, 269, quoting *Associated Press v. United States*, 326 U.S. 1, 20 (1945), and *Roth v. United States*, 354 U.S., at 484 . The First Amendment's protection against governmental abridgment of free expression cannot properly be made to depend on a person's financial ability to engage in public discussion. Cf. *Eastern R. Conf. v. Noerr Motors*, 365 U.S. 127, 139 (1961). 55 [424 U.S. 1, 50]

The Court's decisions in *Mills v. Alabama*, 384 U.S. 214 (1966), and *Miami Herald Publishing Co. v. Tornillo*, 418 U.S. 241 (1974), held that legislative restrictions on advocacy of the election or defeat of political candidates are wholly at odds with the guarantees of the First Amendment. In *Mills*, the Court addressed the question whether "a State, consistently with the United States Constitution, can make it a crime for the editor of a daily newspaper to write and publish an editorial on election day urging people to vote a certain way on issues submitted to them." 384 U.S., at 215 (emphasis in original). We held that "no test of reasonableness can save [such] a state law from invalidation as a violation of the First Amendment." *Id.*, at 220. Yet the prohibition of election-day editorials invalidated in *Mills* is clearly a lesser intrusion on constitutional freedom than a \$1,000 limitation on the amount of money any person or association can spend during an entire election year in advocating the election or defeat of a candidate for public office. More recently in *Tornillo*, the Court held that Florida could not constitutionally require a newspaper [424 U.S. 1, 51] to make space available for a political candidate to reply to its criticism. Yet under the Florida statute, every newspaper was free to criticize any candidate as much as it pleased so long as it undertook the modest burden of printing his reply. See 418 U.S., at 256 -257. The legislative restraint involved in *Tornillo* thus also pales in comparison to the limitations imposed by 608 (e) (1). 56

For the reasons stated, we conclude that 608 (e) (1)'s independent expenditure limitation is unconstitutional under the First Amendment.

2. Limitation on Expenditures by Candidates from Personal or Family Resources

The Act also sets limits on expenditures by a candidate "from his personal funds, or the personal funds of his immediate family, in connection with his campaigns during any calendar year." 608 (a) (1). These ceilings vary from \$50,000 for Presidential or Vice Presidential candidates to \$35,000 for senatorial candidates, and \$25,000 for most candidates for the House of Representatives. 57 [424 U.S. 1, 52]

The ceiling on personal expenditures by candidates on their own behalf, like the limitations on independent expenditures contained in 608 (e) (1), imposes a substantial restraint on the ability of persons to engage in protected First Amendment expression.

58 The candidate, no less than any other person, has a First Amendment right to engage in the discussion of public issues and vigorously and tirelessly to advocate his own election and the election of other candidates. Indeed, it is of particular importance that candidates have the unfettered [424 U.S. 1, 53] opportunity to make their views known so that the electorate may intelligently evaluate the candidates' personal qualities and their positions on vital public issues before choosing among them on election day. Mr. Justice Brandeis' observation that in our country "public discussion is a political duty," *Whitney v. California*, 274 U.S. 357, 375 (1927) (concurring opinion), applies with special force to candidates for public office. Section 608 (a)'s ceiling on personal expenditures by a candidate in furtherance of his own candidacy thus clearly and directly interferes with constitutionally protected freedoms.

The primary governmental interest served by the Act - the prevention of actual and apparent corruption of the political process - does not support the limitation on the candidate's expenditure of his own personal funds. As the Court of Appeals concluded: "Manifestly, the core problem of avoiding undisclosed and undue influence on candidates from outside interests has lesser application when the monies involved come from the candidate himself or from his immediate family." 171 U.S. App. D.C., at 206, 519 F.2d, at 855. Indeed, the use of personal funds reduces the candidate's dependence on outside contributions and thereby counteracts the coercive pressures and attendant risks of abuse to which the Act's contribution limitations are directed. 59 [424 U.S. 1, 54]

The ancillary interest in equalizing the relative financial resources of candidates competing for elective office, therefore, provides the sole relevant rationale for 608 (a)'s expenditure ceiling. That interest is clearly not sufficient to justify the provision's infringement of fundamental First Amendment rights. First, the limitation may fail to promote financial equality among candidates. A candidate who spends less of his personal resources on his campaign may nonetheless outspend his rival as a result of more successful fundraising efforts. Indeed, a candidate's personal wealth may impede his efforts to persuade others that he needs their financial contributions or volunteer efforts to conduct an effective campaign. Second, and more fundamentally, the First Amendment simply cannot tolerate 608 (a)'s restriction upon the freedom of a candidate to speak without legislative limit on behalf of his own candidacy. We therefore hold that 608 (a)'s restriction on a candidate's personal expenditures is unconstitutional.

3. Limitations on Campaign Expenditures

Section 608 (c) places limitations on overall campaign expenditures by candidates seeking nomination for election and election to federal office. 60 Presidential candidates may spend \$10,000,000 in seeking nomination for office and an additional \$20,000,000 in the general election campaign. 608 (c) (1) (A), (B). 61 [424 U.S. 1, 55] The ceiling on senatorial campaigns is pegged to the size of the voting-age population of the State with minimum dollar amounts applicable to campaigns in States with small populations. In senatorial primary elections, the limit is the greater of eight cents multiplied by the voting-age population or \$100,000, and in the general election the limit is increased to

12 cents multiplied by the voting-age population or \$150,000. 608 (c) (1) (C), (D). The Act imposes blanket \$70,000 limitations on both primary campaigns and general election campaigns for the House of Representatives with the exception that the senatorial ceiling applies to campaigns in States entitled to only one Representative. 608 (c) (1) (C)-(E). These ceilings are to be adjusted upwards at the beginning of each calendar year by the average percentage rise in the consumer price index for the 12 preceding months. 608 (d). 62

No governmental interest that has been suggested is sufficient to justify the restriction on the quantity of political expression imposed by 608 (c)'s campaign expenditure limitations. The major evil associated with rapidly increasing campaign expenditures is the danger of candidate dependence on large contributions. The interest in alleviating the corrupting influence of large contributions is served by the Act's contribution limitations and disclosure provisions rather than by 608 (c)'s campaign expenditure ceilings. The Court of Appeals' assertion that the expenditure restrictions are necessary to reduce the incentive to circumvent direct contribution limits is not persuasive. See 171 U.S. [424 U.S. 1, 56] App. D.C., at 210, 519 F.2d, at 859. There is no indication that the substantial criminal penalties for violating the contribution ceilings combined with the political repercussion of such violations will be insufficient to police the contribution provisions. Extensive reporting, auditing, and disclosure requirements applicable to both contributions and expenditures by political campaigns are designed to facilitate the detection of illegal contributions. Moreover, as the Court of Appeals noted, the Act permits an officeholder or successful candidate to retain contributions in excess of the expenditure ceiling and to use these funds for "any other lawful purpose." 2 U.S.C. 439a (1970 ed., Supp. IV). This provision undercuts whatever marginal role the expenditure limitations might otherwise play in enforcing the contribution ceilings.

The interest in equalizing the financial resources of candidates competing for federal office is no more convincing a justification for restricting the scope of federal election campaigns. Given the limitation on the size of outside contributions, the financial resources available to a candidate's campaign, like the number of volunteers recruited, will normally vary with the size and intensity of the candidate's support. 63 There is nothing invidious, improper, or unhealthy in permitting such funds to be spent to carry the candidate's message to the electorate. 64 Moreover, the equalization of permissible campaign expenditures [424 U.S. 1, 57] might serve not to equalize the opportunities of all candidates, but to handicap a candidate who lacked substantial name recognition or exposure of his views before the start of the campaign.

The campaign expenditure ceilings appear to be designed primarily to serve the governmental interests in reducing the allegedly skyrocketing costs of political campaigns. Appellees and the Court of Appeals stressed statistics indicating that spending for federal election campaigns increased almost 300% between 1952 and 1972 in comparison with a 57.6% rise in the consumer price index during the same period. Appellants respond that during these years the rise in campaign spending lagged behind the percentage increase in total expenditures for commercial advertising and the size of the gross national product. In any event, the mere growth in the cost of

federal election campaigns in and of itself provides no basis for governmental restrictions on the quantity of campaign spending and the resulting limitation on the scope of federal campaigns. The First Amendment denies government the power to determine that spending to promote one's political views is wasteful, excessive, or unwise. In the free society ordained by our Constitution it is not the government, but the people - individually as citizens and candidates and collectively as associations and political committees - who must retain control over the quantity and range of debate on public issues in a political campaign. 65 [424 U.S. 1, 58]

For these reasons we hold that 608 (c) is constitutionally invalid. 66

In sum, the provisions of the Act that impose a \$1,000 limitation on contributions to a single candidate, 608 (b) (1), a \$5,000 limitation on contributions by a political committee to a single candidate, 608 (b) (2), and a \$25,000 limitation on total contributions by an individual during any calendar year, 608 (b) (3), are constitutionally valid. These limitations, along with the disclosure provisions, constitute the Act's primary weapons against the reality or appearance of improper influence stemming from the dependence of candidates on large campaign contributions. The contribution ceilings thus serve the basic governmental interest in safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process without directly impinging upon the rights of individual citizens and candidates to engage in political debate and discussion. By contrast, the First Amendment requires the invalidation of the Act's independent expenditure ceiling, 608 (e) (1), its limitation on a candidate's expenditures from his own personal funds, 608 (a), and its ceilings on overall campaign expenditures, 608 (c). These provisions place substantial and direct restrictions [424 U.S. 1, 59] on the ability of candidates, citizens, and associations to engage in protected political expression, restrictions that the First Amendment cannot tolerate. 67 [424 U.S. 1, 60]