

Problem: The amount of money spent for television and radio advertising, political signs and pamphlets and elsewhere during elections has an outsized influence on people beliefs, opinions, and which candidates they vote for. The bulk of campaign spending is provided by a relatively few donors who donate to causes they support, usually ones they would benefit them financially. It follows that they views of relatively few U.S. citizens, typically, the very wealthy, have an inordinate effect on who wins elections.

Although there are numerous limits to the amount that an individual can contribute to a single candidate per election (\$2,700), or the total amount to all candidates per election (\$48,000) and even the total amount when one includes political parties and committees (\$74,600), it is clear that few people can come close to these limits. In fact, the typical contribution per person is less than \$200. The influence of wealthy families is magnified by the fact that each family member can make contributions.

It is important to note that corporations and unions are not permitted to make direct political contributions. However, this important restriction was basically gutted by the Citizens United Supreme Court decision. This decision enabled super PACs to raise unlimited sums of money from corporations, unions, and individuals so long as it does not support or coordinate directly with parties or candidates. This restriction is, of course, easily avoided. The amounts given by some wealthy individuals to PACs supporting particular candidates have run into the millions.

Possible Solutions:

Easy and clear solutions are difficult to define. We will look at discrete groups of donors.

Individuals: As noted above, individuals are subject to limits as to the amount that they can contribute to candidates, parties, and PACs. These contributions are not tax deductible. It may be surprising that I would favor abolishing these limits and allow individuals to contribute as much as they want to the candidates of their choice. They made the money. They should be allowed to spend it in ways that most satisfies them.

However, because this money is being used in ways that affects all Americans, I believe that voters are entitled to know what factors (e.g., political donations) may be influencing the positions that candidates take and how they vote. In consequence, contribution over a prescribed level, probably around \$500 should be reported to Federal and State authorities at the time they are given. The name of the donor, the candidate, and the amount should be published on the internet. At that point, voters can decide whether they want to access this information to assist them in choosing among candidates.

Corporations, Unions: Corporations and Unions are prohibited from contributing directly to a candidate or party. However, with the advent of Super PACs and Citizens United, the amount that they can contribute is effectively unlimited.

I strongly believe that both corporations and unions should be barred from using their revenues (corporations) or dues (unions) to support individual candidates or parties. This is because both corporations and unions represent diverse groups of individuals who hold differing political belief and individuals should not be forced to support the political opinions of corporate or union leaders. Note that by corporations, I am referring only to companies that have limited liability.

Religious Groups: Churches and other religious group are generally tax exempt, but to keep their tax exempt status they must not use any of their resources for political purposes. There are some who believe that this restriction should be eliminated.

I am strongly opposed. To begin with, most religious congregations are diverse and the political opinions of some individuals may not be the same as the church leaders. In addition, because churches are tax exempt, all other taxpayers must pay higher taxes. In effect, other taxpayers are being asked to support the churches activities, whether they agree with these activities or not. For example, some churches are bound to use tax exempt offerings to advocate overturning Roe versus Wade, even though a majority of Americans oppose this action