

## HISTORY OF CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM (part II)

*Judy Samuelson presented the following history of legislation*

Between the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the 1970's, Congress passed the following Acts and Amendments in efforts to balance *Free Speech* against *Corruption*, with corruption deemed the greater threat to honest elections. For example,

1907: The Tillman Act banned contributions from national banks and corporations and unions in a response to corruption in "Gilded Age."

1910 Publicity Act. Required post-election disclosure of contributions and expenditures by some party committees.

Congress – 1911 Amendments to Publicity Act. Mandated disclosure for House/Senate campaigns and caps the amount they can spend.

1925 Federal Corrupt Practices Act. Passed in response to the Teapot Dome scandal, requiring quarterly disclosure reports by all multicandidate political committees and raising spending limits.

1939 Hatch Act. Extends prohibitions on political activity by federal civil service employees.

1940 Amendments to Hatch Act. Imposes the first contribution caps: \$5,000 per year on individual contributions to federal candidates and national party committees.

1947 Taft Hartley Act. Prohibits labor unions from making campaign contributions drawn from their general treasuries and also prohibits corporations and unions from making direct expenditures in connection with either primary or general campaigns for public office.

1971 Federal Elections Campaign Act (FECA). Restricts campaign expenditures on media, limits candidate self-funding, and requires strict public disclosure of financial activity.

1974 FECA Amendments. Limits contributions to campaigns by individuals, parties, and political committees; imposes spending limits on presidential and congressional campaigns; strengthens disclosure requirements; and creates the Federal Election Commission to oversee compliance. The Amendments also create an opt-in public financing program for presidential campaigns.

### Discussion:

To successive terms of legislators, the voting electorate needed protection from corruption of elected officials by large sums of money given by large, not-always-transparent, groups with a specific agenda. That began to change rapidly as the composition of the Supreme Court became more conservative and its decisions applied a tighter, more literal interpretation of the Constitution as applies to cases regarding campaign finance. ##