

The Provisions

Federal regulation

The Federal Election Commission (FEC) is the federal agency responsible for enforcement of campaign laws (Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 [FECA], amendments of 1976).

Disclosure

Presidential candidates must file regular reports listing campaign contributions and expenditures (1971). Donors of \$200 or more must be listed on the reports (1971,1979 amendments). Any organization spending more than \$5,000 on campaigns must establish formal political committees (FECA 1971,1979). Those reports go to the FEC (1974,1976 amendments). Candidates must establish a single organization for their campaigns (1974). The name of the candidate must be listed on campaign materials (1979).

Expenses of local party organizations

Certain expenses, such as get-out-the-vote drives and voter education activities, do not have to be reported (1979). Up to \$1,000 in voluntary services, such as lending a home for meetings and lodging, do not have to be reported as contributions (1979).

Independent spending

Independent spending of \$250 or more must be reported to the FEC (1971,1979). Organizations without formal ties to campaign organizations do not have to adhere to spending limitations (1974).

Lowest-unit rule

Broadcasters can charge campaigns only as much as they charge other advertising clients for spot commercials (1971).

Political action committees (PACs)

Corporations and labor unions may establish separate units to promote political ends and not be in violation of federal prohibitions on direct contributions (1971).

Equal time

Broadcasters selling or giving time to a federal candidate must provide equal time to the candidate's campaign opponents (Section 315 of the Federal Communications Act). Typically, this law gives spokespersons for both parties a chance to respond to the remarks of the other. After a State of the Union address, for example, a representative of the other party delivers a statement. Hollywood movies featuring Ronald Reagan were not permitted to be aired on television during his 1976,1980, and 1984 campaigns because of this provision.

Taxpayer checkoff

Citizens may indicate on their tax forms that they would like \$1 (\$2 for joint filings) of their tax money to be put into the Presidential Election Campaign Fund. This fund has been used to help finance nomination and general election campaigns (1971).

Matching funds during primaries

Candidates may receive federal matching funds if they raise at least \$100,000 in 20 or more states. Each of those states must contribute a total of \$5,000 to the candidate in individual donations of \$250 or less (1974) .

Limits on contributions

Citizens may contribute only \$1,000 to each primary or general election campaign, a total of \$25,000 to federal candidates overall, and \$20,000 to committees of national parties (1976). Candidates may spend only \$50,000 of their own or their family's money on their campaigns if they accept federal funding (1971,1976).

Multicandidate committees

Multicandidate committees- most commonly PACs-may contribute only \$5,000 per candidate and \$15,000 to committees of the national parties (1976).

Federal funding of national conventions

The parties receive \$3 million each for their summer conventions (1974,1979).

Spending limits

Candidates receiving federal matching funds may spend limited amounts during the nomination season and other limited amounts in each of the states (state limits are determined by population). The limit in 1976, the first year this provision was in effect, was \$10 million; the limit has been adjusted to account for inflation.

Federal funding of general election campaigns

The federal government offers the nominee of the major parties equal sums of money for the general election campaign. Candidates who accept the money may not raise or use additional campaign funds. The figure was \$17 million in 1976; the amount has been adjusted each election year according to the inflation rate (1974).