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**CAMPAIGN FINANCE LAWS**

by Scott Grosscup

Colorado's campaign finance laws have seen several changes over the past few years. In 1996, the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 96-082 amending the state's campaign finance laws that had been in use since 1974. Voters then approved citizen-initiated Amendment 15 in the 1996 General Election. The amendment overhauled the state's campaign finance laws by lowering contribution limits for state offices. In 1999, the courts ruled that these limits were too low and therefore unconstitutional. In the 2000 legislative session, the General Assembly again revisited this section of state statute and passed new contribution limits which were signed into law on March 15, 2000.

**Voters Approve Campaign Finance Changes**

Amendment 15 changed the contribution limits for candidates running for state offices, including: Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General, State Treasurer, Senate, House of Representatives, the State Board of Education and Regents of the University of Colorado. The new contribution limits were lower than what the General Assembly established in Senate Bill 96-082. Amendment 15 set the amounts that individuals, political parties, and political committees could contribute to a candidate's bid for political office. Candidates were required to disclose the amounts and sources of their campaign contributions monthly during the election year. Contributions from one candidate to another were prohibited, and the law specified how money left over from one campaign could be used for another. Amendment 15 also created voluntary spending limits, permitting candidates to limit the amount of contributions they received and to use this information in their campaigns.

**Campaign Finance Laws Struck Down by Court**

The contribution limits established in Amendment 15 existed until August of 1999 when U.S. District Judge Daniel Sparr ruled on their constitutionality. The court ruled that the contribution limits for individuals and political committees under Amendment 15 were too low and thus limited a person's right of free speech. Judge Sparr's ruling invalidated the campaign contribution limits that had been approved by the voters leaving the state without campaign contribution limits.

**Campaign Finance Activities in 2000**

This year, in an effort to establish contribution limits following the court's August ruling, the General Assembly passed House Bill 00-1194. The bill limits the amount that an individual, political committee, and corporate or labor organization may donate to a state political campaign. The following table compares the contribution limits that a candidate may receive for an election cycle established by House Bill 00-1194 and those set forth in Amendment 15.

**Table 1: Contribution Limits for State Offices Per Election Cycle**

Contributor	Amendment 15	HB00-1194
<b>GOVERNOR</b>		
Individual	\$1,000	\$5,000
Political Party	\$400,000	No limit
Political Committee	\$1,000	\$5,000
Corporation or Labor Organization	Prohibited	\$5,000

**Table 1: Contribution Limits for State Offices (continued)**

Contributor	Amendment 15	HB00-1194
<b>LT. GOVERNOR</b>		
Individual	\$1,000	\$2,500
Political Party	\$20,000	No limit
Political Committee	\$1,000	\$2,500
Corporation or Labor Organization	Prohibited	\$2,500
<b>SECRETARY OF STATE, STATE TREASURER, OR ATTORNEY GENERAL</b>		
Individual	\$1,000	\$2,500
Political Party	\$80,000	No limit
Political Committee	\$1,000	\$2,500
Corporation or Labor Organization	Prohibited	\$2,500
<b>STATE SENATE</b>		
Individual	\$200	\$1,500
Political Party	\$15,000	No limit
Political Committee	\$200	\$1,500
Corporation or Labor Organization	Prohibited	\$1,500
<b>STATE REPRESENTATIVE</b>		
Individual	\$200	\$1,000
Political Party	\$10,000	No limit
Political Committee	\$200	\$1,000
Corporation or Labor Organization	Prohibited	\$1,000

Limits established by House Bill 00-1194 are increased by ten percent every four years. The bill removes limits on the amount of money that political parties may contribute to a candidate committee while also removing the aggregate amount that a candidate committee may receive from political committees or individuals.

In addition to the limits placed on candidate contributions, House Bill 00-1194 changes the amount that an organization or person may contribute to a political committee or political party shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Amount a Person or Organization Can Contribute to a Political Party or Committee**

Organization	Amendment 15	HB00-1194
Political Party	\$2,500 total to all parties annually	\$25,000 to any single party
Political Committee	\$250 per two-year election cycle	\$25,000 annually

**Other Changes Made to Campaign Finance Laws by House Bill 00-1194**

**Disclosure.** Thirty days prior to an election, candidates are required to report contributions of \$1,000 or more within 24 hours of their receipt to the Secretary of State. Candidates are also required to report the amount of money raised during election years every two weeks beginning in July, as opposed to once a month. The Secretary of State must publish the campaign finance reports on a public web site which will allow the public to view the reports.

**Spending limits.** House Bill 00-1194 eliminates the voluntary spending limits that were established in Amendment 15.

**Committee-to-committee contributions.** House Bill 00-1194 establishes a \$25,000 limit, per election cycle, for contributions made between state candidate committees established for the same candidate. Further, a state candidate committee may accept a contribution from an authorized (federal) candidate committee of another candidate, previously prohibited under Amendment 15. The contributions are subject to the same limitations placed on individuals, corporations, organizations or political committees.

**Prohibitions.** House Bill 00-1194 prohibits contributions from one state candidate committee to a state candidate committee of another candidate. It also prohibits a candidate running for state office from transferring money from a candidate committee established for the same candidate but for a public office outside of state government. For example, a state senate candidate could not use money raised for his or her campaign for mayor to finance a campaign for the state senate. The bill also prohibits contributions from foreign governments, persons, and corporations.