



PHILADELPHIA'S  
(PREDICTABLE)  
UNINTENDED  
CONSEQUENCES

*The Failure of Contribution Limits  
in the 2007 Mayor's Race*

by  
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COMPETITIVE  
POLITICS

*Congress shall make no law...*



# Philadelphia's (Predictable) Unintended Consequences

## *The Failure of Contribution Limits in the 2007 Mayor's Race*

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At first glance Tom Knox appeared to be the best candidate in the 2007 mayoral race to reform Philadelphia's notoriously dirty and rough politics. Knox was a self-made multi-millionaire who not only started and built his own business empire but also helped save the city from financial ruin in the early 1990's.

At least that was the image that Tom Knox tried to portray in his bid to win the Democratic mayoral nomination in the spring of 2007.<sup>1</sup>

And thanks to restrictions enacted in 2003 limiting individual contributions to \$2,500 per candidate and political action committee donations to \$10,000, Knox was nearly able to promote that image without significant opposition.

Contribution limits had been welcomed by

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<sup>1</sup> Because Philadelphia is an overwhelmingly Democratic city, winning the Democratic nomination almost ensures winning the general election.

many as a savior for Philadelphia politics. The leading local campaign finance regulation advocacy group, the Committee of Seventy, said the new rules would "reduc[e] the risk of pay-to-play... (and) slas[h] the cost of elections."<sup>2</sup>

The reality, as is often the case with limits on campaign contributions and political speech, was much different. After Philadelphia's Spring 2007 primary, the first election under the new regulation, the hopes and dreams of the Committee of Seventy and other campaign finance "reformers" that contribution limits would clean up city politics and reduce campaign spending lay in tatters.

Some Philadelphians blame once-apparent savior Tom Knox for the failure of contribution limits. It turns out that Knox was a millionaire

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<sup>2</sup> "Knox's spending, not campaign law, is issue". *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 8, 2007.

## **Contribution limits will “... slash[h] the cost of elections...”**

*Zachary Stalberg,  
President and CEO  
Committee of Seventy*

businessman with an arguably questionable past, willing to spend much of his personal fortune to become mayor. The real culprit, of course, is the understandable desire of Philadelphians to speak out in political campaigns, to share their opinions and inform their fellow citizens about what they see as a candidate’s Good, Bad, and Ugly.

Limiting contributions to candidates led to what can only be described as an apparently unintended yet entirely predictable outcome, with large amounts of money flowing to independent citizen groups engaging in political speech.

### **An Outsider with Insider Money**

As the only non-politician in the field, Knox needed to spend significant funds to compete in the deep and talented Democratic primary field. Other candidates included two U.S. Representatives, Chaka Fattah and Bob Brady, state representative Dwight Evans, and former city councilman Michael Nutter.

Knox said early in the race that he was willing to front up to \$5 million of his own money to compete. Alarmed, the city council passed a “millionaire’s amendment” that

doubled the contribution limits if a self-financed candidate entered the race (evidently, the threshold for what constitutes a “corrupting” amount of money changes to accommodate how much money incumbents think they need to compete).

Despite hopes of “slashing the costs of elections,” Knox spent \$8.2 million, or “nearly as much as his six Democratic opponents combined.”<sup>3</sup> All told, the primary campaign cost a record \$24 million.<sup>4</sup>

### **Tom Knox**

Knox grew up in one of Philadelphia’s public housing projects and left home to join the Navy at age 16. He served four years in the military, returned home, and began amassing his fortune.

On the political stage, Knox gained significant attention and credit when in 1992 then-mayor Ed Rendell asked Knox to join his cabinet and help turn around the city’s distressed financial situation. Knox agreed to do so. He

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.philly.com/dailynews/local/20070505\\_Knox\\_has\\_nearly\\_outspent\\_all\\_rivals\\_combined.html](http://www.philly.com/dailynews/local/20070505_Knox_has_nearly_outspent_all_rivals_combined.html)

<sup>4</sup> “Nutter got most for the money in primary; While Tom Knox spent nearly \$12 million, his closest rival needed less than half that to win.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 15, 2007

promised to serve for \$1 per year and leave his position as soon as the crisis was solved.

It took Knox eighteen months as deputy mayor, earning \$1.50, to turn a \$250 million annual budget deficit into a \$10 million surplus. Upon completion of the turnaround, Knox promptly resigned as promised.<sup>5</sup>

A portion of Knox's wealth was made through his ownership of a bank that issued payday loans. Payday lenders typically offer immediate, short-term loans at extremely high interest rates and are often controversial because customers tend to be poor and are disproportionately members of minority groups.

His businesses were also alleged to have benefited from his political connections. It would soon become apparent that Knox and his lawyers would go to great lengths to keep citizens from hearing these parts of his biography.

## Getting His Name Out

Knox decided to run for mayor in 2007, when incumbent John Street would not be seeking re-election. He began the campaign polling at 1 percent, primarily because he lacked

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.knoxforphilly.com/about>

the name recognition enjoyed by many of his rivals who had held office before.

Knox, though, was fortunate in that he was able to self-finance his own campaign. If a similarly qualified candidate without Knox's resources had tried to emerge it is highly unlikely they would have been able to raise the amount of money necessary to build their name recognition in order to have a chance to compete.

By outspending his closest opponents early in the campaign by at least 5 to 1<sup>6</sup>, Knox took a commanding lead in the crowded field. By April 20th polls showed Knox with nearly twice the support of his nearest rival.<sup>7</sup> With less than four weeks to the primary, Knox seemed to have a lock on the nomination.

## Blindsided?

Reform advocates showed surprise and dismay at the success of the Knox campaign. The *Philadelphia Inquirer's* April 19 editorial said, "in this race, millionaire Tom Knox has end-run the limits, buying his way to the top of the polls using his own money.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.thenextmayor.com/1keystone.html>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.philly.com/dailynews/local/20070420\\_Clout\\_\\_If\\_Knox\\_is\\_to\\_be\\_stopped\\_\\_rivals\\_must\\_act\\_swift-ly.html](http://www.philly.com/dailynews/local/20070420_Clout__If_Knox_is_to_be_stopped__rivals_must_act_swift-ly.html)

**Knox spent \$8.2 million, or "nearly as much as his six Democratic opponents combined." All told, the primary campaign cost a record \$24 million.**

**“Maybe a swift boat 527 torpedo between the stacks, painting Knox as an interest-rate-gouging payday lender and an insider whose businesses have benefited from political connections...”**

*Philadelphia Daily News editorial*

This rare worst-case scenario shows that no campaign finance system is foolproof.”<sup>8</sup>

However, any person with a cursory knowledge of modern campaigns could have predicted this “rare” scenario. A quick jog of the memory brings to mind such self-financed candidates as Michael Huffington, Ross Perot, Steve Forbes, Michael Bloomberg, Jon Corzine, Pete Coors, Maria Cantwell, Douglas Forrester, Mark Dayton, and Blair Hull.<sup>9</sup>

In their defense, perhaps, the so-called reformers simply thought a self-financed candidate was unlikely to be successful. But Monica Yant Kinney, a *Philadelphia Inquirer* columnist was not so naive. She observed, “no one is challenging Tom Knox, because no one can afford to.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Be Careful What You Wish For**

Concerned about Knox’s campaign and what they viewed as his evasion of campaign finance limits they wholeheartedly supported, and

8 “Campaign Finance: Ethics board lives up to its name.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 19, 2007

9 <http://www2.bc.edu/~steenje/sf/SFChome.htm>

10 “Snow falling on voters in Phila. Campaign.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 17, 2007

finding in Knox’s background what they considered to be unsavory business practices, the *Philadelphia Daily News* suggested in an editorial that, “Maybe a swift boat 527 torpedo between the stacks, painting Knox as an interest-rate-gouging payday lender and an insider whose businesses have benefited from political connections”<sup>11</sup> was needed to inform voters.

The *Daily News* was referring to the now infamous “Swift Boat Veterans for Truth” 527 (named after the section of the IRS code that regulates them) organization that ran advertisements sharply critical of John Kerry’s service in Vietnam during the 2004 presidential election.

A few days later the *Daily News* got its wish. A pair of independent advocacy organizations, or 527’s, were formed: “Working People for Truth” and the “Economic Justice Coalition for Truth.” The groups reaped both praise and criticism for filling the void – sometimes from the same organization.

The *Daily News* recognized that “voters are getting more help in sizing up Knox right now” thanks to the 527 groups. Out of the other side of its mouth, though, the *Inquirer* lamented that the groups “circumvent the spirit of the city’s campaign finance

11 “If Knox is to be stopped, rivals must act swift-ly”. *Philadelphia Daily News*, April 20, 2007.

reforms.”<sup>12</sup>

Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell (for whom Knox served as deputy mayor) weighed in saying the 527s “defeat the whole purpose of the election law in Philadelphia.”<sup>13</sup> No mention was made of the alternative to the 527 groups – silence and an uninformed electorate.

The Committee of Seventy was more dogmatic in its criticism. The Committee labeled the 527 effort as a “brazen attempt to avoid the city’s campaign-finance law.”<sup>14</sup> Of course, the two 527’s weren’t avoiding the city’s campaign finance law at all. In fact, they were formed in order to comply with the law.

The Committee of Seventy also argued “when the purported mission of a committee is simply to attack a candidate, you have to ask whether that committee is crossing the line.”<sup>15</sup> Apparently, they place little value in the First Amendment and the right of citizens to criticize candidates for public office.

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12 [http://www.philly.com/dailynews/local/20070420\\_Clout\\_\\_If\\_Knox\\_is\\_to\\_be\\_stopped\\_\\_rivals\\_must\\_act\\_swift-ly.html](http://www.philly.com/dailynews/local/20070420_Clout__If_Knox_is_to_be_stopped__rivals_must_act_swift-ly.html)

13 “‘527’ invasion: Veiled groups, stiff resistance.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 4, 2007.

14 “Group aiming at Knox is criticized for tactic.” *Philadelphia Daily News*, April 27, 2007

15 “Group aiming at Knox is criticized for tactic.” *Philadelphia Daily News*, April 27, 2007

## Litigating Speech

Soon after the formation of the 527’s, Knox’s poll numbers began to change. By April 27, Knox found himself in a dead heat with former councilman Michael Nutter.<sup>16</sup>

Not surprisingly, Knox’s campaign manager Josh Morrow argued that “we have to combat these illegal 527s smearing Tom’s name all over town.”<sup>17</sup> At this point Knox had spent approximately \$7 million and the independent groups less than \$50,000.

Paul Rosen, a lawyer for the Knox campaign, filed letters with local television stations alleging that the ad proposed by Economic Justice Coalition for Truth was “false, misleading, and illegal.”<sup>18</sup>

The ad criticizing Knox’s business career was based on articles published in the *Philadelphia Daily News* (which had described him as “an interest rate gouging payday lender” and “an insider who has benefited from political connections”)<sup>19</sup> and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

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16 [http://cbs3.com/topstories/local\\_story\\_117084718.html](http://cbs3.com/topstories/local_story_117084718.html)

17 “Beseiged Knox raises stakes”. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 1, 2007.

18 [http://www.philly.com/dailynews/local/20070504\\_2\\_stations\\_pass\\_on\\_Knox\\_ads.html](http://www.philly.com/dailynews/local/20070504_2_stations_pass_on_Knox_ads.html)

19 “If Knox is to be stopped, rivals must act swift-ly.” *Philadelphia Daily News*, April 20, 2007

**After being targeted by ads from independent citizens groups, Knox saw his lead evaporate and his unfavorable rating double**

**“Enough voters figured out the difference between TV Tom, the ethical crusader Knox pretended to be, and the cold schemer his business record showed him to be.”**

*Philadelphia Inquirer editorial*

Local news stations refused to air the advertisements citing insufficient documentation of the claims. Alex Talmage, the head of “Economic Justice Coalition for Truth” told the *Daily News* “that the ad was accurate, based on articles in the *Daily News* and *Inquirer*, and that Rosen’s charges were false.”

Spurned by television, the Economic Justice Coalition for Truth sought different outlets through which to get out their message. First, they tried radio. But Knox’s lawyer bullied the radio stations just like he had the television stations.

Undeterred, the Economic Justice Coalition for Truth pledged to produce 75,000 robo-calls over the final 125 hours of the campaign.

The group said in a press release, “Tom Knox will not intimidate our group from telling the truth. No matter how many lawyers he throws at us, we will find a way to get our message out.” The group also promised to file a complaint with the Federal Communications Commission about the media’s refusal to air the ads after the election.

## **Effect of Independent Speech**

Measuring the effect of the 527 organizations on the campaign is difficult. The airtime of their ads – at least for those that got aired at all – was dwarfed by Knox’s media buy. But much like the “Swift Boat Veterans for Truth” in the Bush-Kerry presidential election, a group’s influence can extend beyond the measure of purchased airtime.

The controversy over the 527’s and the content of their ads garnered significant media coverage. From April 26 to May 9, the print media in Philadelphia mentioned the organizations in at least 17 different stories. Undoubtedly, these stories raised concerns about Knox among the general public.

By May 9, just 12 days after the emergence of the 527’s, there was a new front-runner.<sup>20</sup> Michael Nutter had vaulted to a 10-point lead over Knox.<sup>21</sup> According to the *Philadelphia Daily News* one reason for the change was that “Knox, the target of negative ads, saw his... unfavorable rating double.”<sup>22</sup>

Soon, a new 527 emerged to criticize

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.thenextmayor.com/4keystonepoll\\_000.html](http://www.thenextmayor.com/4keystonepoll_000.html)

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.thenextmayor.com/4keystonepoll\\_000.html](http://www.thenextmayor.com/4keystonepoll_000.html)

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.thenextmayor.com/vault/20070509\\_In\\_backstretch\\_Nutter\\_gallops\\_to\\_the\\_lead.html](http://www.thenextmayor.com/vault/20070509_In_backstretch_Nutter_gallops_to_the_lead.html)

Nutter’s record. This group called itself “One Step Closer.” The group had been registered with the state as a PAC since 2005. Philadelphia’s mayor, John Street, made fundraising calls for the group.

The group produced an ad that criticized Nutter’s “stop and frisk” crime proposal.<sup>23</sup> The ads were scheduled to begin on Wednesday May 9 and the group hoped to run them through election day.<sup>24</sup>

While “negative” ads get the most attention, independent expenditure organizations do not limit themselves to just attacking candidates. Nor do they only run television and radio advertisements. For example, the “Progressive Agenda PAC” raised more than \$78,500 to pay for signs and an election-day field operation in support of second-tier candidate Dwight Evans.<sup>25</sup>

## The Outcome

On May 15, Michael Nutter won the Democratic primary with 36 percent of the vote, besting Knox by 11 points.<sup>26</sup> What made the difference?

According to the *Inquirer*, “Enough voters figured out the difference between TV Tom, the ethical crusader Knox pretended to be, and the cold schemer his business record showed him to be.”<sup>27</sup> Undoubtedly, the 527 organizations were instrumental in helping shape this impression of Knox.

But, if “reformers” have their way, future voters may not have the benefit of unlimited independent speech in future elections. Pledging to combat unregulated political speech, the chairman of the city’s ethics board, Richard Glazer, has said that the board will “take a hard look” at the independent advocacy organizations.<sup>28</sup>

Zach Stalberg, former editor-in-chief of the Philadelphia Daily News and president of the Committee of Seventy, was more direct. He said that the groups are “perversions of

**Independent citizen groups are “perversions of the entire campaign process” and “...by the next election cycle they won’t be allowed to participate”**

*Zachary Stalberg,  
President and CEO  
Committee of  
Seventy*

23 [http://www.philly.com/inquirer/local/pa/20070511\\_527\\_ad\\_scorned\\_\\_Street\\_silent.html](http://www.philly.com/inquirer/local/pa/20070511_527_ad_scorned__Street_silent.html)

24 [http://www.philly.com/inquirer/local/pa/20070508\\_Third\\_527\\_says\\_it\\_just\\_focues\\_on\\_issues.html](http://www.philly.com/inquirer/local/pa/20070508_Third_527_says_it_just_focues_on_issues.html)

25 [http://www.philly.com/dailynews/local/20070509\\_A\\_bigger\\_role\\_for\\_PACs.html](http://www.philly.com/dailynews/local/20070509_A_bigger_role_for_PACs.html)

26 [http://www.nytimes.com/cq/2007/05/15/cq\\_2733.html](http://www.nytimes.com/cq/2007/05/15/cq_2733.html)

27 <http://www.philly.com/inquirer/opinion/7527302.html>

28 [http://www.philly.com/dailynews/local/20070509\\_A\\_bigger\\_role\\_for\\_PACs.html](http://www.philly.com/dailynews/local/20070509_A_bigger_role_for_PACs.html)

**“Wealthy individuals speaking completely ‘independently’ are favored...” when contribution limits are enacted.**

*Bob Bauer  
Counsel  
Democratic  
Senatorial and  
Congressional  
Campaign  
Committees*

the entire campaign process”<sup>29</sup> and he predicted “that by the next election cycle they won’t be allowed to participate.”<sup>30</sup>

## **Free Press But No Free Speech**

Those familiar with the history of campaign finance regulation are concerned - but not surprised - by the comments of Stalberg and Glazer. It is especially disheartening that someone like Stalberg, a journalist whose career depends on the First Amendment, is willing to restrict someone else’s voice.

Stephen Hoersting, Vice President of the Center for Competitive Politics, was not surprised by the reaction in Philadelphia. “Once you start regulating speech you don’t stop. In Philadelphia we see the ‘witch-hunt’ mentality that many so-called reformers have regarding political speech,” he said.

It is important for our democracy that all voices be heard not just voices from media elites. A group of concerned Philadelphia lawyers, educators, and community activists wrote an op-ed in the *Philadelphia*

<sup>29</sup> [http://www.philly.com/dailynews/local/20070509\\_A\\_bigger\\_role\\_for\\_PACs.html](http://www.philly.com/dailynews/local/20070509_A_bigger_role_for_PACs.html)

<sup>30</sup> [http://cbs3.com/topstories/local\\_story\\_130184745.html](http://cbs3.com/topstories/local_story_130184745.html)

*Daily News* that highlighted the inherent limitations of the media.

This group of citizens wrote, “We believe that the media, especially but not exclusively the print media, continue to try to subvert the voice and role of citizens by acts of commission and omission.”<sup>31</sup>

They continued, “The papers indicated to readers that there were only two candidates who could win. The majority of citizens could not imagine that there could be subtle manipulation by the media - some people in the media are not even aware, sometimes, of the biases they project - cutting off a speaker prematurely, omitting some of the facts in a ‘news’ story, facts that would tell a very different story.”<sup>32</sup>

It is ironic that the 527’s were only trying to do what newspapers editorial pages get to do everyday - reach hundreds of thousands of voters with unfiltered commentary about candidates and elections. At the very least, those outside the media establishment should be able to have the same opportunity to convey their messages.

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.philly.com/dailynews/opinion/20070514\\_WHERE\\_OUR\\_ELECTION\\_PROCESS\\_HAS\\_FAILED.html](http://www.philly.com/dailynews/opinion/20070514_WHERE_OUR_ELECTION_PROCESS_HAS_FAILED.html)

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.philly.com/dailynews/opinion/20070514\\_WHERE\\_OUR\\_ELECTION\\_PROCESS\\_HAS\\_FAILED.html](http://www.philly.com/dailynews/opinion/20070514_WHERE_OUR_ELECTION_PROCESS_HAS_FAILED.html)

## Lessons for the future

As Philadelphians re-examine their campaign finance laws it would be wise for them to remember that one of the most important rights guaranteed to citizens and citizen groups is the ability to speak their minds about elections and candidates without government limits.

Because 527 groups are one of the few remaining ways citizens are still able to collectively make their voices heard, any restrictions on 527 groups – from contribution limits to forced disclosure of donors – would further erode these First Amendment rights.

The 2007 primary race in Philadelphia demonstrates once again that contribution limits favor wealthy candidates and force others to turn to other forms of advocacy to express their support. Similarly, enacting contribution limits on 527 groups would again benefit wealthy citizens at the expense of everyone else.

This is because individuals can spend their own money without limit, according to the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in the 1976 Buckley v. Valeo case. For someone with deep pockets, this can be a significant advantage over opponents with more modest personal funds who are limited in how much they can solicit from contributors.

Citizens lacking the ability to spend millions or tens of millions of their own dollars must pool their resources with fellow citizens in order to compete with big-spending individuals. A ban on 527 groups would limit the speech of individuals able to contribute only \$50, or even \$50,000, to support or oppose candidates. Meanwhile, individuals able to spend millions supporting or opposing candidates could not be stopped.

Attorney Bob Bauer, counsel to the Democratic Senatorial and Congressional Campaign Committees, says, “the wealthy individual continues to do fine” under a system of contribution limits.

Forced disclosure of contributions to 527s can also dampen speech. History shows that often, because of the fear of reprisal, the only way to speak freely is by speaking anonymously.

This happened in February 2007, when President Bush nominated Sam Fox to be U.S. ambassador to Belgium. However, during the 2004 presidential election Fox exercised his constitutional right to free expression by donating \$50,000 to Swift Boat Veterans for Truth.

At Fox's confirmation hearing, Senator Kerry verbally attacked Fox and led the effort to derail

**The State of Alabama demanded membership and contributor records for the NAACP in the 1950s, when that organization was challenging Jim Crow segregation. The Supreme Court ruled that this obvious effort to harass and intimidate the NAACP was a “restraint on the freedom of association.”**

Fox's nomination.<sup>33</sup> Fox ultimately withdrew was forced to withdraw from consideration.

It isn't only wealthy contributors who face retribution for contributing to causes or candidates. A contributor to Senator John Edwards 2004 presidential campaign found her name, address, and employer listed under the threatening heading "Now you know where they live" on the Web site of a group considered by the FBI to be a domestic terror threat.

The group had found her information through the Edwards campaign's disclosure reports, which revealed she worked for a corporation targeted by the group. The contributor told the *Washington Post*, "I got inspired. I gave. Then I got scared."<sup>34</sup>

During the civil rights movement, when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was vigorously challenging segregation in the south, the State of Alabama demanded the NAACP turn over information on their contributors and members active in opposing Jim Crow laws.

It does not take great imagination to understand the threat to NAACP contributors and members that such disclosure would entail.

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33 [http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2007/03/28/kerry\\_targets\\_ambassadorial\\_bid\\_of\\_swift\\_boat\\_benefactor/?page=1](http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2007/03/28/kerry_targets_ambassadorial_bid_of_swift_boat_benefactor/?page=1)

34 *Washington Post*, July 1, 2007

In their opinion siding with the NAACP against Alabama's demand for disclosure, the U.S. Supreme Court said it "is hardly a novel perception that compelled disclosure of affiliation with groups engaged in advocacy may constitute...a restraint on freedom of association."<sup>35</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting that the Federalist Papers, a foundation of our nation's understanding of the U.S. Constitution and published specifically to encourage ratification of the Constitution, were all signed under the pen name "Publius," masking from the public the true authors of these important pieces.<sup>36</sup> Citizens should be frightened by any "reform" that enables politicians to seek retribution and punishment against their critics. Philadelphia, of all places, should remember that anonymous speech – political pamphleteering - enabled the founding of this nation.

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35 NAACP v. Alabama, 357 U.S. 462, 459 (1958).

36 The authors of the Federalist Papers, James Madison, John Jay, and Alexander Hamilton were unknown until 1792, several years after their publication and the ratification of the Constitution.

## **A Slippery Slope**

For the rest of us, Philadelphia should be a warning against the dangers of regulating political speech and the contributions that make such speech possible. The consequences of contribution limits and other restrictions on political speech are millionaire candidates, campaigns dominated by independent organizations instead of candidates, and a system that favors political insiders who have the resources and knowledge to suppress dissenting voices by litigating to prevent political speech.

Rather than seeking to further restrict political rights, Philadelphia should return to its roots by standing for freedom and liberty in campaign finance. Repealing the recently enacted contribution limits should be the Philadelphia's next step, not banning independent citizen groups from speaking. Philadelphia should remember its roots as a birthplace of the American Revolution and once again let freedom ring.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Mike Schrimpf is communications director for the Center for Competitive Politics. Prior to joining CCP, Mike served as chief of staff for the president of the Hamilton County (OH) Commission. In that capacity, Mike ensured that the Commissioner was fully informed on all policy matters and managed all communications for the Commissioner.

Before becoming chief of staff, Mike worked as a policy analyst in the Hamilton County (OH) Administrator's office. As policy analyst, Mike was deeply involved in the interviewing, analyzing, and drafting of the County's recommendation on Master Developer selection for a \$750 million mixed-use development project on Cincinnati's waterfront. He also worked to craft and implement a sewer extension policy that would aid new development in the County. In addition, Mike evaluated and recommended solutions to the County's jail overcrowding problem.

Mike has been published and quoted by many leading news outlets including the Washington Post, New Jersey Star-Ledger, The Hill, New York Sun, and Roanoke Times.

Mike graduated with a degree in political science from Tufts University in 2005. While an undergraduate, Mike interned in the office of Governor Mitt Romney. He is a native of Cincinnati, OH and currently resided in Arlington, VA.

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