



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO  
**PRESS RELEASE**

**Ethics Commission**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT UPHOLDS  
LOCAL CAMPAIGN LAWS FOR UPCOMING ELECTIONS**

United States District Court Judge Larry A. Burns issued a ruling today in which he denied Lincoln Club of San Diego County's motion for a preliminary injunction seeking to enjoin the City from enforcing key provisions of its local campaign laws. As a result of this ruling, committees that make independent expenditures supporting or opposing a candidate for City elective office must continue to abide by the City's contribution limit of \$250 per candidate for district races and \$300 per candidate for citywide races.

Judge Burns determined that the City's campaign finance laws do not prevent the Lincoln Club from effectively advocating for the candidate of their choice. He also observed that a recent ruling by the United States Supreme Court supports the constitutionality of the City's campaign finance laws that limit the amount of contributions that can be made to organizations that make independent expenditures in City candidate elections.

The San Diego Ethics Commission is responsible for making recommendations to the City Council regarding local campaign laws. As Commission representatives explained during a 2004 overhaul of campaign laws, the provisions challenged by the Lincoln Club are essential to achieving one of the fundamental objectives of local campaign finance law: to prevent corruption made possible by large financial contributions and the erosion of public confidence in the City's electoral process through the appearance of corruption.

According to the Commission Chair, Dorothy Leonard, “It is a widely-recognized fact that large contributions to candidates create a sense of obligation and the appearance of corruption. It is illogical and contrary to public policy to enforce strict limits on the amount of money that someone can give to a candidate while imposing no limits whatsoever on contributions to a third-party for purposes of supporting that candidate. Even when committees make independent expenditures without candidate coordination, it may be presumed that the candidate being supported would be aware of any large contributions made to finance the expenditure, and accordingly that candidate could be expected to feel indebted or obligated to those who made such contributions.”

The court’s ruling confirms the Commission’s position with respect to the subject regulations. Rather than restricting the ability of committees to participate in the political process, local laws are designed to regulate the ability of wealthy individuals and corporations to impose their influence on candidates and officeholders. Commissioner Leonard remarked that “Local law in no way limits the amount of money that an individual or a committee may spend to support or oppose a City candidate. Instead, local law simply limits the source and amount of money that may be contributed to others, and thereby encourages committees that seek a louder voice in City elections to increase their membership and develop a broader base of support.”

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