I have received your e-mail requesting input on the proposal to double campaign contribution limits and voluntary contributions. My simple message is: do not do it. It is already expensive to run for elected office. I find it frustrating on a personal level that my elected officials are out raising money instead of working on issues, but I understand the pressure they feel to be prepared for the next campaign.

Voters in Oakland should be able to evaluate candidates on the individuals' qualifications to hold elected office and make thoughtful decisions in the public interest, not on their ability to access money and send out glossy mailers. Before I ran for school board, I thought about it long and hard, mainly because I knew I would need to raise money. In my campaign, one of my opponents spent double the amount I did, the vast majority coming from the candidate's personal resources. If the limits were raised, I predict that will create further barriers to encouraging people of average means to run for office. Particularly when the office for which they are running is not compensated at a full-time or even half-time rate (members of the school board in Oakland receive a monthly stipend just under $800/month, not sufficient to allow one to give up a job, even though the demands of the office are high).

It is my understanding that one of the purposes of instant run-off voting was to decrease the costs of campaigns in our City. Raising the contribution limit seems contrary to that goal and in direct conflict with the desire of the voters.

I urge the Public Ethics Commission to issue a negative recommendation on this proposal.
Sincerely, Jody London

Dear City Members of the Public Ethics Commission,

The Sierra Club would like to comment on the issue of campaign contribution limits in Oakland. It is our understanding that the city attorney and others have proposed to raise campaign contribution limits from $600 per contributor (the old limit) to $1,200 - citing the consolidation of elections into one "big election" in the fall (due to Instant Runoff Voting).

The Sierra Club opposes this change to the contribution limits. The City of Oakland made the right decision when it passed the Oakland Campaign Reform Act (OCRA) several years ago. The Sierra Club thinks that expenditure ceilings are good for the public and for the environment because they:

1) Discourage candidates from feeling compelled to raise excessive amounts of money to run for local office, which makes them beholden to donors, who may have other interests than good stewardship of the environment.

2) Allow candidates to spend their time legislating and not fundraising, enabling better management by city government, including management of issues related to environmental protection.

We urge keeping the current OCRA contribution limits. Like the League of Women Voters, we especially urge you not to make any changes this election cycle, but instead put off this decision until after 2010, if you must.

Sincerely, Kent Lewandowski
Chair, Northern Alameda County Group
Sierra Club, SF Bay Chapter

Is America turning into a country where only the rich can run for office and get elected?
Are we turning into Great Britain before the American Revolution or France before the French Revolution?
America was founded on the premise that anyone could run for office and become a representative of the people. With the rise of campaign donation limits it is obvious that only special interest will have great influence in who gets elected. This is a travesty of the American political system and it should be halted. Sincerely,
June Irizarry - Long time resident of Oakland, CA

Please count me as one more voter that is tired of having elections be decide by the most money. I want free and independent elections and look forward to the day that we have a level playing field in which each person has one vote and elections are not bought by the highest bidder. Please keep the limits on campaign donations, don't double them.
John Kraft

I do not support Atty. Russo's recommendations that will double the cost of running for election in Oakland. This will limit the pool of qualified candidates. The candidates that do run will have to spend more time raising funds than evaluating the issues facing the city. Plus an elected officials ability to make objective decisions is diluted by "payback" obligations to funders.

Let's keep Oakland's politics clean of special interests. Let votes not dollars determine our elected officials.
Jane Klein
Oakland, CA 94640

I strongly oppose this. Lower limits help us stay more honest and make it more likely that the election is actually based on issues and qualifications.

And the availability of extra funds to make higher donations to a campaign suggests to me that unethically high prices have been charged for services or products somewhere. Wouldn't we all rather make our own decision about who (and what) to contribute our hard-earned money to than to have it made for us by Microsoft, or Sun, or Mechanics Bank, or an insurance company?

As Oakland registered voters, we protest Russo's latest proposal to increase campaign limits for local offices. There is NO NEED for this; have we not already seen and suffered from ambitious politicos buying public office? Let's keep the playing field level for new blood and keep to the spirit of instant run-off elections.
Sincerely, Jean Komatsu Carlos de Luz

A bad idea. Goes in the opposite direction of what good government advocates are trying to accomplish, The LWVO has the right idea
Gen Katz Oakland 94902

As a long time Oakland resident and taxpayer, I am opposed to any increase in the limit of campaign contributions. I was suprised to learn that Oakland's current contribution limit ($700) is already higher than many other California cities, including Los Angeles, Santa Monica and our two prominent neighbors, San Francisco and Berkeley. May I remind you that Oakand is not a wealthy city; nor is it populated by wealthy residents. Although it's not a perfect city, it's my home and where my kids are growing up. There are many Oakland folks who work hard for the community and who contribute to the greater good. I would not want them disadvantaged in local elections.
I urge you to refuse any further increase to the current limit.
Elizabeth Benhardt
Oakland, Ca 94601

Raising the level of contribution to campaigns is a bad idea and will not serve the public good. Thanks.
Anna Barnard
Fairview Park Neighbors

I think it is wasteful to raise the campaign limits to the highest in the state for city elections. This is a diverse city that ranges from the very poor to the very wealthy. By raising the cmpaign limits so much you are basically leaving out any person who is not already wealthy. You will be silencing the voices of the poorer members of our community. You are following the lead of our current supreme court in making our elections even more focused on money rather than the opinions or needs of the people. Please do not raise the limits at all. Jennifer Formoso

As a 25 year Oakland resident/taxpayer, any move to increase the already high limit in Oakland for contributions is an outrage to ethical campaign reform efforts. Stop this move toward to pander to those who have rich friends and want to buy public offices! Allan Brill

These should be REDUCED NOT INCREASED. What are they thinking?

I oppose raising the campaign donation limit, if you want my opinion. Oakland's limit is already way above average for the state and it opens the door for more corporations to control politics in this town. No, thank you! Kristen Caven

I oppose John Russo's proposal to raise campaign contribution limits in Oakland.

My interest is simply in keeping the influence on campaigns with ordinary voters rather than wealthier people and businesses. Please reject this proposal. Thank you! Blair Miller

Don't put campaign limits so high as under consideration. We don't want our government positions bought. Thanks,
Beverly N. Dance
MBA, SPHR-CA, CCP, CEBS

Hello, I am an Oakland resident concerned about the debates regarding spending limits for the Mayor's race. I write in the opinion that it is imperative to keep the campaign spending limits within a reasonable range of spending for all of the candidates who might choose to run for the next election. The Mayor's race should be structured in such a way that voters decide who is most dedicated to the city of Oakland -- not because the candidate has the richest friends and supporters, but because the candidate's campaign has convinced residents that their city will be best led by that person.

For the sake of Oakland and its residents, I hope that the campaign spending limits will remain within a reasonable range for all those who seek to run. Elizabeth Ingenthron

Campaign Limits in the Public Ethics Commission, Thursday, March 4th, 6:30 pm: The Rules Committee City Attorney Russo's proposal to double City campaign limits... proposed in a report... to update the city ordinance on elections to conform with Ranked Order Voting.

Being that I had a long term interest in Oakland, in a large part for its key value in keeping the wheels of commerce in the Bay Area running as best as possible for the benefit of the entire Bay Area as the key shipping port for Central and Northern California. I beg your indulgence to describe two Campaign Finance options. Preamble: Presidential Candidate Obama once supported construction of a transcontinental high speed Freight-Only railway for common use of all rail lines. Given the absolute need to avoid, or duplicate, same-level road crossings (they kill over 300 a year), very costly tunnels and bridges, to keep the rails level and the new ability to optimize paths using the latest airplane and satellite GPS data and computer technology. It is my opinion that this project will be done, as soon as possible, possibly to put people back to work, all across the nation.
I am one of many that believe we may not be out of the woods, not yet, foreclosures are going up, again. Some are even talking about a "double-dip" and a "Jobless" Recovery lasting into 2011.

The key decision will be made of the best way to reach the West Coast. Between Seattle and Los Angeles the ideal place is Oakland which has the biggest container ship capacity. Will our City Council Members be ready to takle this huge task or, will new members, supported by a single sponsor require the inevitable delays to bring them into the team? This issue is important for and for this I ask and beg your indulgence to describe two alternatives that might be acceptable to the majority in the Ethics Commission.
Option A. Make a new Finance Office of the Ethics Commission the recipient of all donation above some limit, for example, a Private Business could give X00s Dollars to one, or more, Council Members up to the new allowed limit that you will set. And, the same donor may contribute Y00s Dollars to the new Ethics Commission Finance Office, without any limits, to be evenly divided amongst current Council Members running for re-election.
Option B. Same as Option A but, private contributions directly to a council member would reduce its share of the general contributions dollar for dollar, or by a fraction. The intent of reducing some of the equal share contributions is to

provide some minimal support to new candidates that can match the city contribution by contributions from other donors. two for one, or some other ratio. Competition that is based on ideas will bring the best in all candidates -and keep voters interested.
I hope to bring an abbreviated, 3 minute, version to your meeting on Thursday, March 4th, 6:30 pm, at the City Hall. But, I learnt that too often the Public Interest is so high that only one minute was allowed. At the MTC Meeting on its budget, even that was not enough and only the first 20 or so spoke. But, they knew the great majority was against their views and it must have been tiresome to hear the same views repeated, though in different ways.
Michael F. Sarabia

I oppose the proposed increase in campaign spending limits. While I don't believe money is the root of all evil, I do believe that allowing higher campaign spending limits will make office seekers and office holders more beholden to wealthy campaign donors and special interests. Also, with the new ranked order voting, there is no need to raise the limits as there will be only one election with no runoff.
Sincerely, John Eckhouse

Campaign spending limits limit my right to freedom of speech via my choice of candidate and that candidate's ability to get out their political viewpoint. There is little difference between $700 and $1400 for those that actually give to campaigns, and a good fundraising candidate should have the right to express views and attract voters by the broadest methods possible. This is not an ethics issue...it's an issue that the city council should take up as is their authority and right to do. Both mayoral candidates are simply using this issue to gain their own advantage...there's ethical shenanigans surrounding this mayoral election, and it's certainly not campaign spending limits.
Melissa Rosengard Oakland, CA

Please do not support or approve raising campaign contribution limits. It limits the voice of "we the people" and gives an unfair advantage to special interests. We need city leaders who focus on the needs of the people who live in Oakland, not to special interests. There should be a level playing field for all candidates.Thank you.
Jeanne Nixon

Who changes rules in the middle of an election cycle? Don’t let big money drive our city to further shame. We voted for IRV and spending limits because we want to see things in the city working – not so that more money is spent in electioneering .
Emily Rosenberg District 6 Oakland