

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

*Keeping Track
of the PACs*

"Giving Till It Hurts: 1982 Campaign Prompts New Look at Financing Races" by Richard E. Cohen, in *National Journal* (Dec. 18, 1982), 1730 M St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Political action committees (PACs) contributed about \$80 million of the \$300 million spent by candidates during the 1982 congressional campaign. But, despite growing criticism of the PACs' influence, says Cohen, *National Journal* staff correspondent, the evidence that they "get what they pay for" is "mixed" at best.

Corporate PACs have come under the heaviest fire. Accounting of the 1982 campaign is not complete, but the tally so far shows that they gave \$12.5 million, as opposed to \$8.1 million for labor union PACs, \$9.8 million for those of trade associations, and \$2.8 million for New Right and other ideological PACs.

Surprisingly, in House and Senate races, Democrats collect more PAC money than Republicans do, accounting for 58 percent of such 1982 contributions counted so far. One reason: Labor gave 93 percent of its money to Democrats while corporate PACs gave only 56 percent of their donations to Republicans. As in the past, corporate givers tended to favor incumbents, regardless of party affiliation.

But the effects of PAC giving are far from clear. In 1980, for example, 32 *successful* challengers in House races spent an average of \$350,000



An unresolved question: Do PACs buy votes in Congress, or do they merely support candidates who already share their views?

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on their campaigns—more than three times as much as did unsuccessful challengers. But the average winning challenger in 1982 spent only \$287,000. Since most winners were Democrats, Cohen argues, other factors besides campaign outlays, such as the economic recession, must have led voters to turn out G.O.P. incumbents.

Some critics contend that PAC contributions influence votes in Congress. Yet as Representative Thomas Foley (D-Wash.) argues: “Members often receive money from people who like their views. But that doesn’t mean the vote is because of the contribution.”

Reformers, meanwhile, cannot agree on a solution. One option—limiting total campaign spending for each candidate—was written into law by Congress in 1974 but struck down by the Supreme Court in 1976. Other proposals meet with stiff opposition in Congress.

Also in the background is the cautionary example of the 1974 campaign finance reforms, which limited both PAC and individual donations. In response, donors simply created more PACs: Contributions by PACs have more than doubled since 1978.

Exploiting the Constitution

“On Meddling with the Constitution” by Gary L. McDowell, in *Journal of Contemporary Studies* (Fall 1982), Transaction Periodicals Consortium, Dept. 541, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

Recent years have brought a sharp increase in the number of constitutional amendments proposed in Congress, usually at the behest of special-interest groups. Far from being a sign of democratic vitality, says McDowell, a Dickinson College political scientist, the upsurge is symptomatic of an American political malfunction.

Since the Constitution was adopted in 1789, some 10,000 constitutional amendments have been proposed. Only 33 were sent to the states for a vote; 26 were ratified; the last, in 1971, permitted 18-year-olds to vote.

Amending the Constitution has always served as an outlet for the popular passions of the moment, McDowell notes. (An 1838 proposal would have barred anyone who fought in a duel from holding public office.) But the average number of amendments proposed each year suddenly rose to 310 during the 1963–68 period, from an average of 65 during the previous 35 years. Since 1969, U.S. Congressmen and Senators have introduced an average of 232 amendments each year.

The emphasis has changed since the early 1960s. In the past, proposed amendments were split evenly between those concerned with the forms of government—presidential elections, the tenure of judges—and with individual rights, such as divorce or voting. Today, rights-related proposals predominate.

Such developments, McDowell argues, reflect “a general deterioration in public faith in the institutions of republican government.” Most of the amendments put forth today—on abortion, equal rights for