



The
UNIVERSITY
of VERMONT

James M. Jeffords Center's
Vermont Legislative Research Service



The Effect of Contribution Limits on Contribution Amounts

In this report we assess the potential impact of the proposed campaign finance contribution limits contained within the Vermont Senate's bill S. 20 on the amounts sources contribute to candidates. We do so by examining the contributions to a sample of candidates in the 2010 election. For an analysis of the potential effects of the bills limits on the amounts candidates are able to raise and spend and the competitiveness of Vermont elections, see our earlier report at <http://www.uvm.edu/~vlrs/PoliticalProcess/contributionlimits.pdf>.

Methodology

A total of 42 contribution profiles were considered in this project. Examination of 30 randomly selected House candidates, 10 randomly selected Senate candidates, and the two major gubernatorial candidates were deemed necessary to adequately sample the donations received by candidates. Names of candidates were generated at random from a list of general election candidates in 2010 by using the statistical computer program SPSS.¹ The contribution data was obtained from National Institute for Money in State Politics (found www.followthemoney.com) which collected the data from records filed with the Vermont Secretary of State's Office. Contribution totals reported below include total contributions for the entire election cycle (2009 to 2010).

The Effect of Proposed Limits on Contributions to House and Senate Candidates

In Figure 1 we have graphed all of the total contributions from each non-party and non-family source given to the randomly selected 30 house candidates from 2009 to 2010.² Contributions

¹ If a candidate selected in this process did not file a campaign finance report (presumably because they did not raise or spend more than \$500) then another candidate was selected randomly to replace the candidate who did not file on the list. The sample for the senate included 6 Democrats and 4 Republicans; 5 winners and 5 losers. The sample of house candidates included 16 Democrats, 2 Progressives, and 12 Republicans; 11 losers and 19 winners.

² Un-itemized contribution totals were divided into \$100 contributions (the level at which individual contributions must be reported) and entered into the chart as a series of \$100 contributions plus whatever amount remained after the division (so a \$1,023 total of un-itemized contributions would be entered into the graph as ten \$100 contributions and one \$23 contribution). This is the most conservative representation of the likely size of un-itemized contributions.

are arranged by amount from the smallest to the largest. The red line in the graph represents the contribution limit of \$500 per election cycle (\$250 per election) for House candidates proposed under S.20.

The contribution limits proposed in S.20 would affect a very small proportion of contributions given to Vermont state house candidates. Of the 30 candidates profiled, 5 would each have lost \$500 in contributions each.

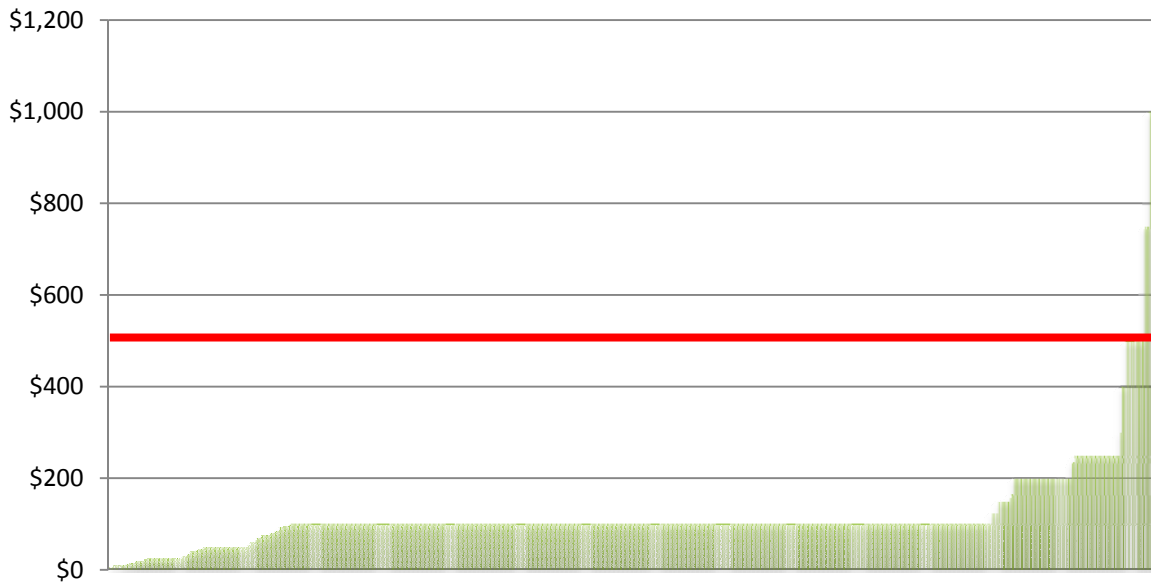


Figure 1: Total amount contributed from each individual non-party and non-family source (organized by amount) 30 randomly selected Vermont House Candidates in 2010. (The red line represents the proposed contribution limits in S.20.)

Source: Created by the authors from data obtained from the National Institute for Money in State Politics, accessed March 4, 2011, www.followthemoney.com.

In Figure 2 we have graphed all of the total contributions from each non-party and non-family source given to the randomly selected 10 senate candidates from 2009 to 2010.³ Contributions are arranged by amount from the smallest to the largest. The red line in the graph represents the contribution limit of \$1,000 per election cycle (\$500 per election) for senate candidates

³ Un-itemized contribution totals were divided into \$100 contributions (the level at which individual contributions must be reported) and entered into the chart as a series of \$100 contributions plus whatever amount remained after the division (so a \$1,023 total of un-itemized contributions would be entered into the graph as ten \$100 contributions and one \$23 contribution). This is the most conservative representation of the likely size of un-itemized contributions.

proposed under S.20. None of the contributors to the 10 candidates randomly selected gave more than money than would be allowed under S. 20.

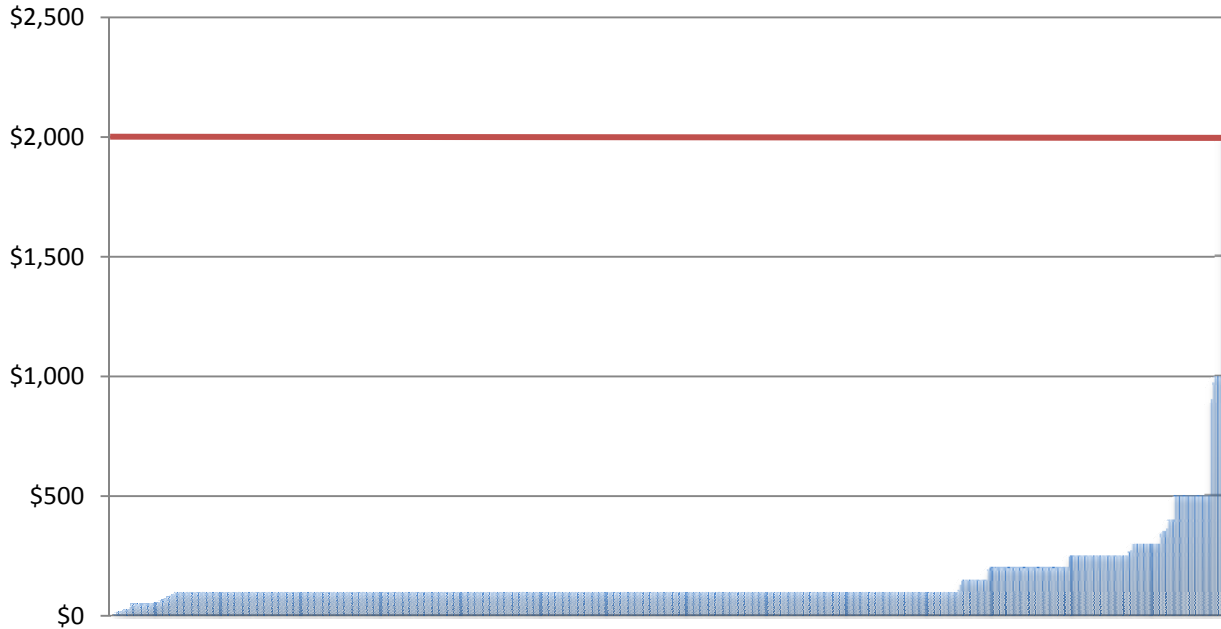


Figure 2: Total amount contributed from each individual non-party and non-family source (organized by amount) 10 randomly selected Vermont Senate Candidates in 2010. (The red line represents the proposed contribution limits in S.20.)

Source: Created by the authors from data obtained from the National Institute for Money in State Politics, accessed March 4, 2011, www.followthemoney.com.

Effect of Party Contribution Limits on State House and Senate Candidates

In Figure 3 and 4 we present the total contributions from political parties to house and senate candidates for the entire 2010 election cycle. As in previous graphs we put a red line in the graphs representing the proposed party contribution limits in S.20.

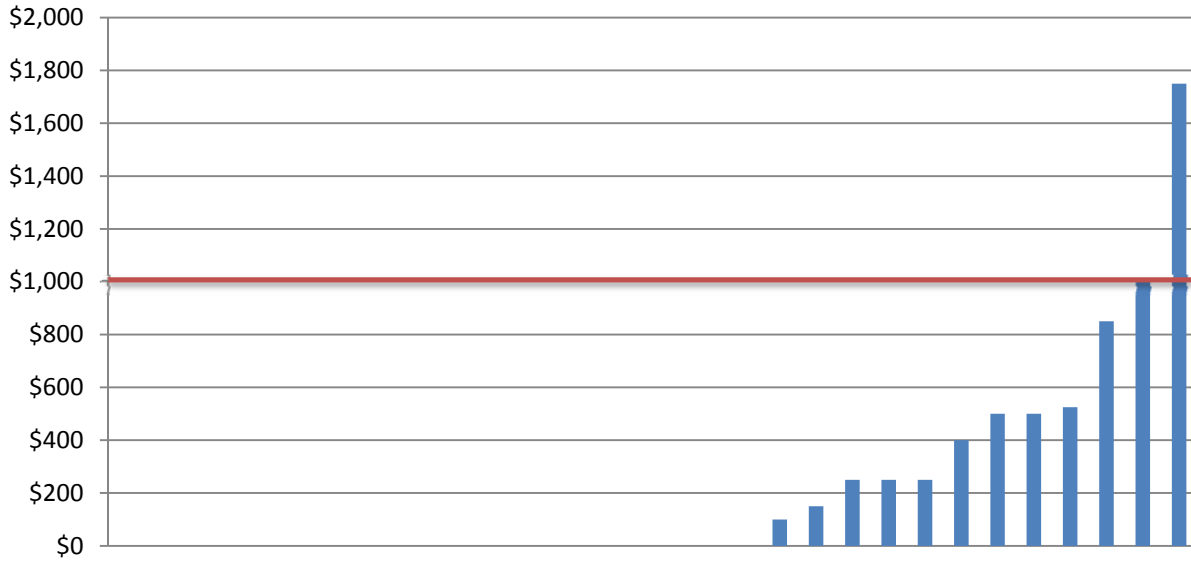


Figure 3: Total party contributions for the 2010 election cycle to sample of 30 house candidates (red line represents the total election cycle party contribution limit).

Source: same as Figures 1 and 2

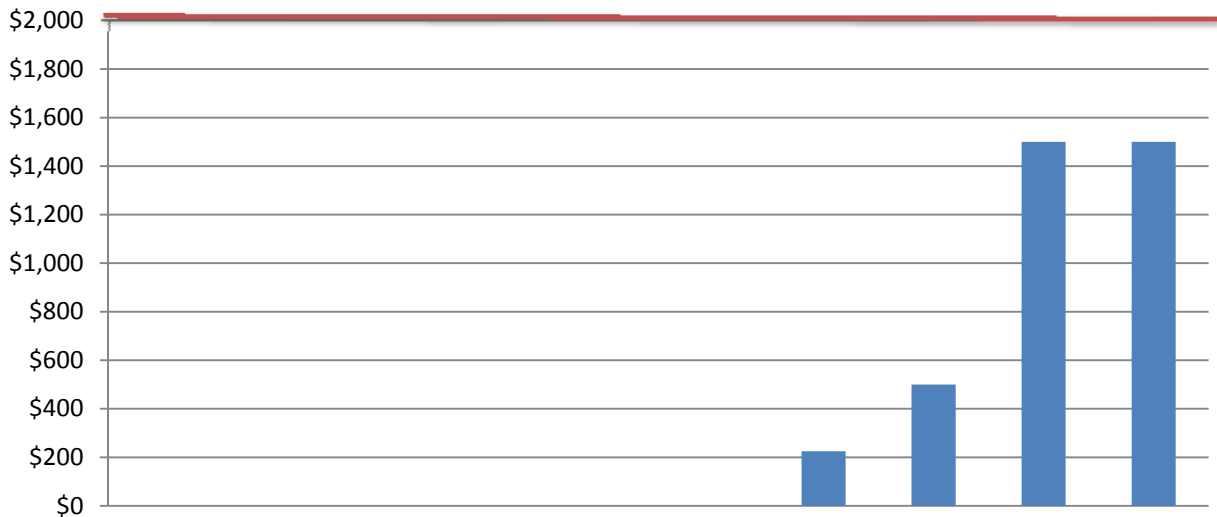


Figure 4: Total party contributions for the 2010 election cycle to sample of 10 senate candidates (red line represents the total election cycle party contribution limit).

Source: same as Figures 1 and 2

Effect of Party Contribution Limits on Gubernatorial Candidates

In Figure 3 we have graphed the total amounts raised during the 2010 election cycle by source for the two major party candidates in the 2010 gubernatorial election in Vermont, Republican candidate Brian Dubie and Democratic candidate Peter Shumlin. The amounts are broken down by source, with blue bars representing non-party contributors who gave in amounts less than \$2,000 (none of these contributors' totals exceeded that amount),⁴ green bars representing party contributions, orange bars representing balances carried over from previous campaigns, and purple bars representing personal and/or family contributions.

In total, Brian Dubie raised \$1,578,060 in campaign contributions. Of that total, \$1,505,050 was contributed by non-party contributors who gave in amounts less than \$2,000. Dubie's campaign also received \$4,250 from family members and had a forwarded balance of \$25,226. Brian Dubie received \$43,534 from Republican Party organizations, amounting to 2.76% of his total contributions.

In total, Peter Shumlin raised \$1,485,331 in campaign contributions. Of that total, \$1,131,917 was contributed by non-party contributors who gave in amounts less than \$2,000 and represented 76.21% of the overall contributions. Shumlin's campaign saw personal and family contributions to the amount of \$320,826 which represented 21.6% of the total contribution amount. The Democratic Party contributed \$32,588 to the campaign which represents 2.19% of the total.

With the \$30,000 limitation proposed for gubernatorial campaigns in S.20, Brian Dubie would have received \$13,534 less in contributions from the Republican Party, which is 0.86% of the total. Peter Shumlin would have received \$2,588 less in contributions.

⁴ Some did contribute more, but were refunded the amount over \$2,000.

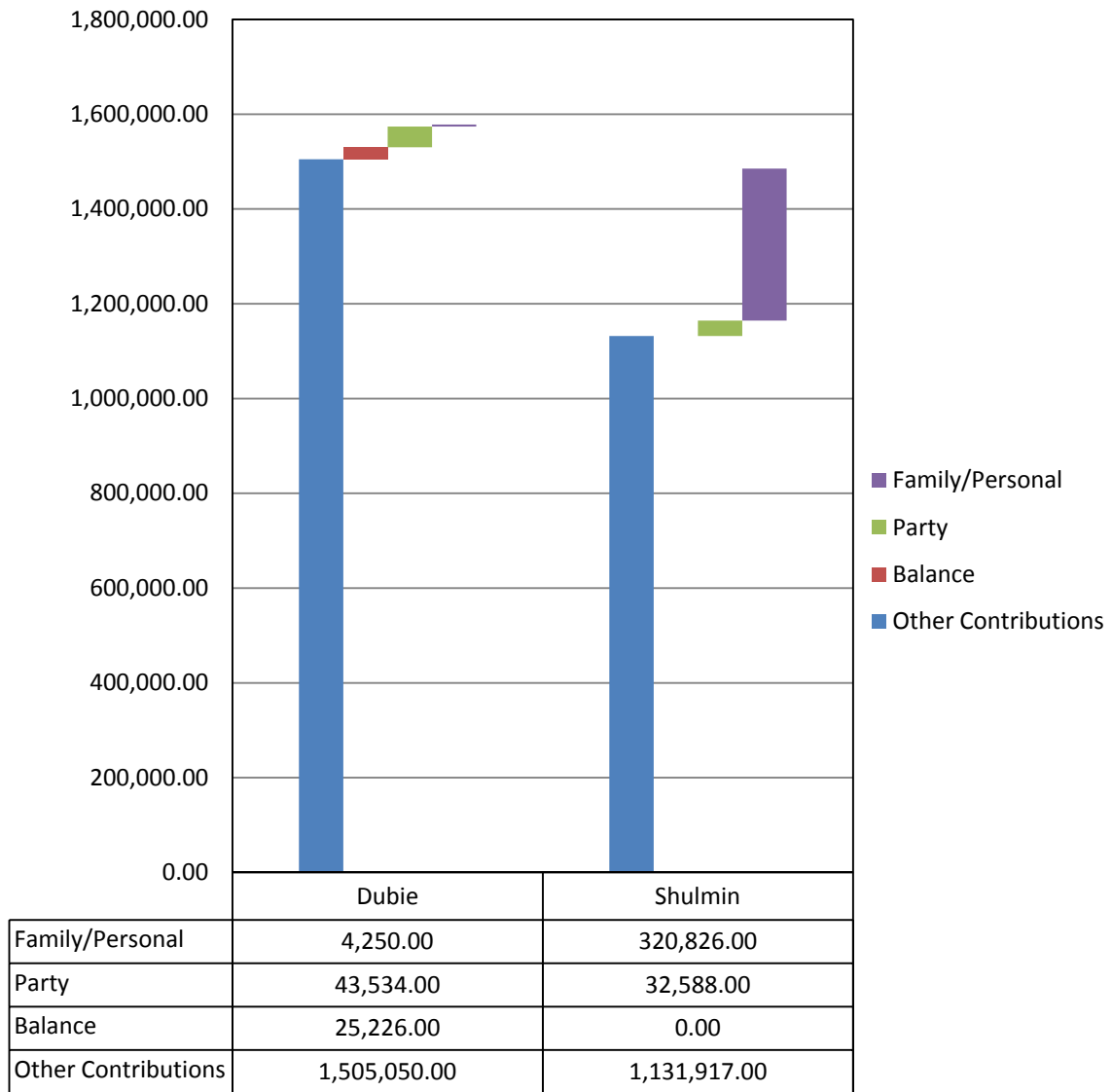


Figure 3: Money raised by source for major party general election candidates in the 2010 Vermont gubernatorial contest.

Source: Created by the authors from data obtained from the National Institute for Money in State Politics, accessed March 4, 2011, www.followthemoney.com.

Prepared in response to a request by Senator Jeanette White by Kelly Walsh, Adam Roof, and Christopher Teel, under the supervision of Professor Anthony Gierzynski on March 4, 2011.

Disclaimer: This report has been compiled by undergraduate students at the University of Vermont under the supervision of Professor Anthony Gierzynski. The material contained in the report does not reflect the official policy of the University of Vermont.