

POLITICAL BROADCASTING—VETO MESSAGE

M E S S A G E

FROM

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

RETURNING

WITHOUT APPROVAL THE BILL (S. 3637) ENTITLED "AN ACT TO REVISE THE PROVISIONS OF THE COMMUNICATIONS ACT OF 1934 WHICH RELATE TO POLITICAL BROADCASTING."

OCTOBER 13, 1970.—Read and ordered to be printed

To the Senate of the United States:

I return herewith, without my approval, S. 3637, a bill to revise the provisions of the Communications Act which relate to political broadcasting.

This legislation is aimed at the highly laudable and widely supported goals of controlling political campaign expenditures and preventing one candidate from having an unfair advantage over another. Its fatal deficiency is that it not only falls short of achieving these goals but also threatens to make matters worse.

S. 3637 does not limit the overall cost of campaigning. It merely limits the amount that candidates can spend on radio and television. In doing so, it unfairly endangers freedom of discussion, discriminates against the broadcast media, favors the incumbent officeholder over the officeseeker and gives an unfair advantage to the famous. It raises the prospect of more—rather than less—campaign spending. It would be difficult, in many instances impossible, to enforce and would tend to penalize most those who conscientiously attempt to abide by the law.

The problem with campaign spending is not radio and television; the problem is spending. This bill plugs only one hole in a sieve.

Candidates who had and wanted to spend large sums of money, could and would simply shift their advertising out of radio and tele-

vision into other media—magazines, newspapers, billboards, pamphlets, and direct mail. There would be no restriction on the amount they could spend in these media.

Hence, nothing in this bill would mean less campaign spending.

In fact, the bill might tend to increase rather than decrease the total amount that candidates spend in their campaigns. It is a fact of political life that in many Congressional districts and States a candidate can reach more voters per dollar through radio and TV than any other means of communication. Severely limiting the use of TV and radio in these areas would only force the candidate to spend more by requiring him to use more expensive techniques.

By restricting the amount of time a candidate can obtain on television and radio, this legislation would severely limit the ability of many candidates to get their message to the greatest number of the electorate. The people deserve to know more, not less, about the candidates and where they stand.

There are other discriminatory features in this legislation. It limits the amount of money candidates for a major elective office may spend for broadcasting in general elections to 7¢ per vote cast for the office in question in the last election or \$20,000 whichever is greater. This formula was arrived at through legislative compromise and is not based on any scientific analysis of broadcast markets. It fails to take into account the differing campaign expenditure requirements of candidates in various broadcast areas. In many urban centers, the \$20,000 limitation would permit a Congressional candidate to purchase only a few minutes of broadcast time, thus precluding the use of radio or television as an effective instrument of communication. On the other hand, \$20,000 spent on television broadcasting in another district would enable a candidate to virtually blanket a large area with campaign advertising spots. For example, 30 seconds of prime television time in New York City costs \$3,500; in the Wichita-Hutchinson, Kansas area, it costs \$145.

S. 3637 raises a host of other questions of both principle and practice. It would require that broadcasters charge candidates no more than the lowest unit charge of the station for comparable time. This is tantamount to rate-setting by statute and represents a radical departure for the Congress which has traditionally abhorred any attempt to establish rates by legislation.

Among the other questions raised and left unanswered are these: How would expenditures of various individuals and organizations not directly connected with the candidate be charged? Would they be considered part of a candidate's allowed total expenditure, even if they were beyond the candidate's control? And how would money spent by a committee opposing a candidate be accounted? Would it be included in the total for that candidate's opponent, even though spent without his consent or control? This bill does not effectively limit the purchase of television time to oppose a candidate.

In the end, enforcement of the expenditure limitation would in most cases occur after the election. This raises the possibility of confusion and chaos as elections come to be challenged for violation of S. 3637 and the cases are still unresolved when the day arrives on which the winning candidate should take office.

There is another issue here which is perhaps the most important of all. An honored part of the American political tradition is that any little known but highly qualified citizen has the opportunity to seek and ultimately win elective office. This bill would strike a serious blow at that tradition. The incumbent—because he has a natural avenue of public attention through the news media in the conduct of his office—would have an immeasurable advantage over the “out” who was trying to get in. The only others who would share part of this advantage would be those whose names were well-known for some other reason.

What we have in S. 3637 is a good aim, gone amiss. Nearly everyone who is active or interested in the political process wants to find some way to limit the crushing and growing cost of political campaigning. But this legislation is worse than no answer to the problem—it is a wrong answer.

I urge that the Congress continue to analyze and consider ways to reach this goal through legislation which will not restrict freedom of discussion, will not discriminate against any communications medium, will not tend to freeze incumbents in office, will not favor the famed over the worthy but little-known, will not risk confusion and chaos in our election process and will not promote more rather than less campaign spending. Such legislation will have to be far better than S. 3637.

I am as opposed to big spending in campaigns as I am to big spending in government. But before we tamper with something as fundamental as the electoral process, we must be certain that we never give the celebrity an advantage over an unknown, or the officeholder an extra advantage over the challenger.

RICHARD NIXON.

THE WHITE HOUSE, *October 12, 1970.*

S. 3637

NINETY-FIRST CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AT THE SECOND SESSION, BEGUN AND HELD AT THE CITY OF WASHINGTON ON MONDAY, THE NINETEENTH DAY OF JANUARY, ONE THOUSAND NINE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY

AN ACT To revise the provisions of the Communications Act of 1934 which relate to political broadcasting

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That (a) the first sentence of section 315(a) of the Communications Act of 1934 (47 U.S.C. 315(a)) is amended by inserting before the colon the following: “, except that the foregoing requirement shall not apply to the use of a broadcasting station by a legally qualified candidate for the office of President or Vice President of the United States in a general election”.

(b) Section 315(b) of such Act is amended to read as follows:

“(b) The charges made for the use of any broadcasting station by any person who is a legally qualified candidate for any public office shall not exceed the lowest unit charge of the station for the same amount of time in the same time period.”

SEC. 2. Section 315 of the Communications Act of 1934 is further amended by redesignating subsection (c) as subsection (f) and by inserting immediately before such subsection the following new subsections:

“(c) (1) For purposes of this subsection, the term ‘major elective office’ means the office of President, United States Senator or Representative, or Governor or Lieutenant Governor of a State.

“(2) (A) No legally qualified candidate in an election (other than a primary election) for a major elective office may spend for the use of broadcasting stations on behalf of his candidacy in such election a total amount in excess of—