

“The 30-Second Candidate”

wisconsinvote.org

Issue-Oriented Political Campaign Advertising

Fact: In the landmark decision *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976), the US Supreme Court created two broad categories of political advertising: issue advocacy and express advocacy (1998 PBS Online and WGBH/Frontline).

The Court ruled that issue ads, intended to educate the public on issues rather than specific candidates, are protected by First Amendment guarantees of free speech. Sponsors of issue ads are not required to publicly disclose the sources of their funding, and there is no limit on the amount of money any individual, union, or corporation can contribute to an issue ad campaign.

Express advocacy is advertising that explicitly recommends the election or defeat of a candidate. Candidate ads are subject to federal campaign regulations on contribution limits and public disclosure of funds (see the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002).

How much is too much?

Locate 2 or 3 issue-oriented political campaign ads and make a chart to track the number of minutes devoted to these ads during primetime television and the amount of space devoted these ads in a local newspaper. Compare these figures to those you calculated in earlier activities for express advocacy television and newspaper ads. How much is too much?

Who pays?

Research the “Paid for by...” information on an issue-oriented political campaign ad. What organization claims sponsorship of this ad? How does this organization raise money for placing issue-oriented ads? Who belongs to this organization? Who contributes money to this organization? Why do you think they paid for this ad?

Truth Check

Pick an issue-oriented political campaign ad for the 2008 election. Now do a truth check:

- ✓ **Who paid for this ad?**
- ✓ **What is this ad communicating? What is its message?**
- ✓ **How is the message being communicated?**
- ✓ **What is the intended audience for this ad, based on the message and presentation?**
- ✓ **How does this ad affect viewers? How does it affect you?**
- ✓ **What is the purpose of this ad?**

The 30-Second Candidate is a project of Wisconsin Public Television and the Educational Communications Board.