17 March Hearing paper

Good afternoon.

I am Landis Aden, a long time community activist here in Arizona and the local Phoenix/Mesa area.

As such I have taken an active part in numerous elections, as a volunteer, over many years now. Congressional, Senate and Presidential elections. Including past campaigns of several of Arizona's Congressmen, and both current U.S. Senators.

I have also been active in citizens groups that have taken a keen interest in such elections. A key distinction that needs to be made, is that all of these groups are non profit, grassroots folks. Nobody makes any money, nobody makes any profit beyond protecting their rights and interests.

For the most part, we have no money, we give no money.
For example; one group that I have been active with for many years, was founded in 1909; before statehood.
I have done some preliminary research, and so far over it's 92 year history, it has given to candidates, $0.00.
In the interest of self preservation and protecting its and its members rights and interests, it does have a legislative subdivision. In the year 2000, a presidential election year, it spent a grand total of $4,433.02. That was for everything. Including replacing worn out office equipment, ISP, telephones, promotional and issue ads, etc.
You don't get anymore grassroots than that. I am having a very difficult time trying to understand how our vast sums are undermining our republic.

Because of or perhaps despite our proliferate spending, groups like our have been fairly effective in influencing legislation, and the election process. Perhaps the successes of "penny players" are an irritant to the rich and powerful.

In looking over the latest copy of one of the campaign "reform" bills, among many other things, the very low dollar limits caught my attention. Are these artificially low limits designed to prevent any effective or significant citizen involvement? While I'm not a finance expert, just ask my wife, I do know that to run a state wide initiative campaign will run to a million dollars. And, I would think that a Congressional campaign would run in the area of $600K to a million plus, is spending one thousand, or even ten thousand going to make a difference? Only if there are issues involved.

Speaking of issues. We see quite a bit about "phony issue ads". Perhaps if someone has been in Washington DC far too long, and it has become about "moi", that "issues" aren't all that any more. But to us, out here, issues are everything.
We don't care what color suit or tie or dress the candidate wears, don't much care which party. We don't care how good/bad they may look in jeans. We don't care if they have or spent more money than their opponents. It is where they are on our issues. By the way, out here the republicans have consistently out raised and out spent their opponents, and still manage to lose.

I am very concerned about developments in campaign laws and legislation that while seeming to be focused on the huge amounts of money going to campaigns. Whether soft hard or scrambled, they all seem to have provisions to limit or restrict the involvement of us common citizens. Especially our First Amendment Rights.

As the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Thomas Vs. Collins (1945): "The very purpose of the First Amendment is to foreclose public authority from assuming a guardianship of the public mind. ... In this field every person must be his own watchman for truth, because the forefathers did not trust the government to separate the true from the false for us."

I am concerned for our First Amendment Rights, and our Right and Freedom of association. Whether it is campaign laws, or the tax code, it seems that many of these are designed to muzzle, gag, or discourage the common man and woman from being a participant.

Does the current campaign system need fixing? It sure does. Conversations with acquaintances in the corporate world have indicated that they feel that their contributions are more like "protection money" than "bribes".
Does money corrupt? Yes it does, but not as much as power.

John F Kennedy's famous quote of now so long ago,
"Ask not what your country can do for you, But what you can do for your country."
That has been an inspiration for many of us in these grassroots citizens groups.
It would be a tragedy if the federal government prevented us from doing that.

Thank you