

PRESIDENT MOUL: We have ceased debate. I will remind the senators that the house is under call. Would the senators please return to the Chamber and record their presence. And I will recognize Senator Ashford for closing.

SENATOR ASHFORD: Thank you, Madam President and members. I appreciate the debate on this issue. I think this is one of those rare times when I think we have an opportunity to make a real philosophical choice on an issue that is obviously before us now, and has been before us over the past several years. How are we going to deal with the exorbitant spending on campaigns, and even more importantly to me, how are we going to bring the people more into the process of this Legislature, and how are we going to level that playing field between the people and the legislative process, and the special interest groups that obviously play such a significant role in how legislation is formed. And I think one of the ways to do that is to have reasonable restrictions, not only on expenditures. And I appreciate Senator Baack's dilemma, because the Supreme Court has been very clear that if we are going to restrict campaign expenditures, we need to include, as part of that package, public funding. That makes it difficult to craft an amendment or a bill that will deal with expenditures that will have the kind of teeth that is needed. And in this case Senator Chambers has brought out the point that there are ways of getting around the campaign expenditure limitations. Those vehicles are real, they exist, they're out there, and they'll be utilized. The other side, or the other side of this issue is the issue of campaign contributions. Our Supreme Court, in the Buckley case, has made it extremely clear you can restrict campaign contributions, because the chance for abuse is extensive. The chance for abuse is extensive. And I know over the noon hour large groups and lobbyists, who are...do not want to lose that control, they want not only to tell you how to...or suggest to you how to vote, but they want to be able to say to you that not only am I important because I represent a special interest group, I'm important because I can get for you campaign contributions that will enable you to get elected. And that's fine to an extent, that's fine to an extent. That's fine that special interest groups have the ability to go out and raise funds, and that PACs, that is designed to bring people into the process have the ability to bring those dollars into the political process, that's fine. But I think there has to be a reasonable limitation. Right now there is no limitation. We