DRAFTER'S NOTE
FROM THE
LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU

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1. Currently, ch. 11., stats., generally requires disclosure of financial activity by individuals and committees seeking to influence the election or defeat of candidates for state or local office [see ss. 11.01 (6), (7), (11), and (16), 11.05, and 11.06, stats.], unless a disbursement is made or obligation incurred by an individual other than a candidate or by a committee which is not organized primarily for political purposes, the disbursement is not a contribution as defined in the law, and the disbursement is not made to expressly advocate the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate [see s. 11.06 (2), stats.]. This language pretty closely tracks the holding of the U.S. Supreme Court in *Buckley v. Valeo, et al.*, 96 S. Ct. 612, 656–664 (1976), which prescribes the boundaries of disclosure that may be constitutionally enforced (except as those requirements affect certain minor parties and independent candidates). Proposed s. 11.01 (16) (a) 3., which requires registration and reporting by individuals who or committees that make certain communications within 60 days of an election containing the reference to a candidate at that election, an office to be filled at that election, or political party, appears to extend beyond the boundaries which the court permitted in 1976. As a result, its enforceability at the current time appears to rest upon a shift by the court in its stance on this issue. In this connection, see also *North Carolina Right to Life Inc. v. Bartlett*, 168 F.3d 705 (4th Cir. 1999), in which the court voided North Carolina's attempt to regulate issue advocacy as inconsistent with *Buckley*.

2. Proposed s. 11.62, which permits a court to nullify an election if certain violations of the campaign finance law are sufficient to have affected the election result, raises legal issues that make it difficult to predict how it will be applied. In *State ex rel. La Follette v. Kohler*, 200 Wis. 518 (1930), the Wisconsin Supreme Court held that the legislature has the power to void the election of a candidate who procured his nomination by illegal means. However, this case did not apply to a legislative candidate. In the case of a legislative candidate, the result might be affected by article IV, section 7, of the Wisconsin Constitution, which makes each house the judge of the elections, returns and qualifications of its members. Additionally, under this draft, violations that result in nullification of a candidate's election may be committed by persons other than the candidate. Also, if a candidate takes office and must be removed, it is generally held that where a constitution prescribes methodology for removal of officeholders (as does the Wisconsin Constitution), that methodology is exclusive. See 67 C.J.S. Officers s. 120, p. 486.

3. I also want to note briefly that a few of the provisions of this draft are innovative, and we do not yet have, to my knowledge, specific guidance from the U.S. Supreme Court concerning the enforceability of provisions of these types. It is well possible that a court may find a rational basis for these provisions that would permit them to be upheld. However, because of the concerns expressed by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Buckley v. Valeo, et al.*, 96 S. Ct. 612 (1976), and certain other cases that attempts to regulate campaign financing activities may, in some instances, impermissibly intrude upon freedom of speech or association, or equal protection guarantees, it is possible that enforceability problems with these provisions may occur. In particular, those provisions concerning which we do not have specific guidance at this time are:

(a) Proposed s. 11.12 (6) (b) and (c), which impose a waiting period of up to 21 days before certain contributions may be transferred or accepted or before certain disbursements may be made or obligations to make disbursements may be incurred.

(b) Proposed s. 11.12 (7) (a), (b), (c), and (d), which imposes additional reporting requirements upon candidates who decline to accept disbursement and contribution limitations and restrictions.

(c) Proposed s. 11.24 (1t), which prohibits certain candidates and their personal campaign committees from accepting contributions within 10 days of an election in which the candidates participate. Although the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that covers Wisconsin has not addressed the constitutionality of this type of provision, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th circuit has indicated that this type of provision may be constitutional, provided the provision allows a candidate to contribute an unlimited amount to his or her own campaign during the period. See *Gable v. Patton*, 142 F.3d 940 (6th cir. 1998), *Cert. den*. 525 U.S. 1177 (1998).

(d) Proposed s. 11.50 (9) (b) to (bc), which increase the public grants payable to certain candidates when independent disbursements are made against them or their opponents, or when their opponents raise more than a specified level of contributions from certain sources, or when special interest committees, including conduits, report that they intend to make or transfer contributions to their opponents, and proposed s. 11.31 (3p), which increases disbursement limitations by an amount equal to any grant received under proposed s. 11.50 (9) (b) to (bc). Although relevant case law has developed regarding this issue in the federal courts of appeal, there is no consensus among these courts on this issue. Due to the unsettled nature of the law in this area, it is not possible to predict how a court would rule if these statutes were challenged.

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