SENATE THIRD READING
SB 900 (McNerney)
As Amended August 13, 2026
2/3 vote

SUMMARY

Allows the names of top campaign contributors that are required to be disclosed on campaign advertisements to be shortened or abbreviated. Makes minor changes to the formatting and text of certain required disclosures on campaign advertisements such that those disclosures can be made in a smaller amount of space.

Major Provisions

1) Allows the name of a top campaign contributor to be shortened in required disclosure statements on campaign advertisements by using specified abbreviations, leaving out specified words or phrases that are part of a contributor's name and are not essential for voters to recognize the contributor, and by shortening disclosure information in other specified ways.

2) Requires applicable disclosures in print advertisements to be displayed in the following order:

   a) A notice that the advertisement was created using artificial intelligence, followed by at least half a blank line.

   b) A notice that the advertisement was not paid for by the candidate, followed by at least half a blank line.

   c) The identification of the committee that paid for the advertisement.

   d) The phrase "Ad Committee's Top Funder(s)," which shall appear on a separate line and be underlined, followed by the identification of the top contributors to the committee that paid for the advertisement, which shall be listed in bold.

3) Requires disclosures on print advertisements that are larger than those designed to be individually distributed, including yard signs or billboards, to list all top contributors on a single horizontal line, where possible, with the contributors separated by bullet points or numbers. Provides that the size of the text of written disclosures on such advertisements shall be the lesser of 5 percent of the height or width of the advertisement. Provides that ads with a surface area exceeding 187 square inches are considered to be larger than those designed to be individually distributed.

4) Shortens the disclosure statements that are required to appear on an advertisement supporting or opposing a candidate that is paid for by an independent expenditure (IE) as follows:

   a) In the case of an advertisement that is not paid for by a candidate for any office, shortens the statement from specifying that the advertisement was not authorized by a candidate or a committee controlled by a candidate to the statement "Not paid for by candidate."

b) In the case of an IE advertisement that was authorized or paid for by a candidate for another office, shortens the statement from "This advertisement was not authorized or paid for by a candidate for this office or a committee controlled by a candidate for this office" to "Not paid for by a candidate for this office."

5) Prohibits the inclusion of any non-required text or images in the disclosure area on a campaign advertisement.

COMMENTS

AB 249 (Mullin), Chapter 546, Statutes of 2017, significantly changed the content and format of disclosure statements required on specified campaign advertisements in a manner that generally required such disclosures to be more prominent, among other provisions. AB 249 is commonly known as the "Disclose Act." The passage of AB 249 marked the culmination of seven years of debate and negotiation over similar legislation. AB 249 took effect on January 1, 2018.

Since AB 249 was enacted, several bills have modified the content and format of the disclosure statements created by that bill. Most recently, SB 1360 (Umberg), Chapter 887, Statutes of 2022, made various changes to the text and formatting of required disclosures on petitions and campaign advertisements, including allowing a committee to shorten its name in a disclosure on certain types of advertisements where longer disclosures are less practical.

Campaign disclaimer laws, such as those established by the Disclose Act and related legislation, are primarily intended to promote transparency by informing the public about the entities funding political advertisements. However, these laws also recognize that strict disclaimer requirements can sometimes be impractical or overly burdensome—particularly with respect to certain forms of communication.

To address this, the Disclose Act includes exceptions and accommodations that ease disclaimer requirements in specific cases. For instance, small promotional items that cannot reasonably accommodate printed disclosures are generally exempt. Additionally, for formats like radio or prerecorded phone ads—where full disclaimers would occupy a disproportionate amount of time—the law permits abbreviated versions, disclosing fewer contributors to maintain the effectiveness and feasibility of these advertisements.

Ensuring that disclaimer requirements are reasonable is essential, as overly burdensome mandates may face legal challenges for infringing on First Amendment rights. That's particularly true where regulations are so onerous that they deter individuals or groups from engaging in political speech.

The Disclose Act allows for shorter disclaimers on large, printed materials, such as billboards and lawn signs, recognizing that these formats require large, readable text and cannot accommodate lengthy disclosures without compromising legibility. Despite these existing accommodations, disclaimers under the Disclose Act can still occupy a significant portion of such advertisements—sometimes 50% or more of the available space.

This bill proposes modest changes to reduce the space required for disclaimers by allowing abbreviated content and minor formatting adjustments. These revisions aim to improve the practicality of compliance while also helping to safeguard the constitutionality of California's campaign disclaimer laws by reducing the risk of them being deemed excessively burdensome.

California voters passed an initiative, Proposition 9, in 1974 that created the Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC) and codified significant restrictions and prohibitions on candidates, officeholders, and lobbyists. That initiative is commonly known as the Political Reform Act (PRA). Amendments to the PRA that are not submitted to the voters, such as those contained in this bill, must further the purposes of the initiative and require a two-thirds vote of both houses of the Legislature.

According to the Author
"The Citizens United decision has opened the floodgates to political spending by SuperPACs and other outside groups, with campaign spending skyrocketing across the country. California has made several positive steps to daylight who is funding political messaging; however some disclosure messages have become cumbersome to read and confusing to voters. SB 900 will reformat disclosure messages to be shorter and easier to understand."

Arguments in Support
One of the co-sponsors of this bill, the California State Outdoor Advertising Association, writes in support, "California's existing laws require political advertisements to disclose their sponsors to promote transparency and inform voters. However, in the case of yard signs or billboards (particularly for committees supporting or opposing a candidate or proposition), the regulations have inadvertently resulted in disclosures that can consume up to 50% of the total space on the sign. For a committee, the top three contributors must be listed, each taking up a minimum of 5% of the sign's height/space, which can crowd out the messaging of the advertisement itself. This can make advertisements difficult to read and reduce the viability of billboards as a means of political communication. The disproportionate size of the disclosure text undermines the intent of the law by impairing legibility... SB 900 presents a thoughtful and reasonable solution by using widely recognized abbreviations to shorten contributor names, replacing repetitive legal language with clear, concise alternatives, and using the FPPC-issued committee ID number to link to full disclosure information."

Arguments in Opposition
None to the current version of the bill.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, costs of approximately $211,000 in the first year and $204,000 annually thereafter to the FPPC for an additional attorney position to determine whether an abbreviation is approved or word is non-essential in the name of a top contributor via written advice, as the FPPC anticipates receiving numerous advice requests (General Fund). The FPPC will also incur costs to update educational materials and trainings to reflect the other revised disclosure requirements.

VOTES

SENATE FLOOR: 39-0-1
YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
ABS, ABST OR NV: Dahle

ASM ELECTIONS: 8-0-0
YES: Pellerin, Johnson, Bennett, Berman, Elhawary, Ellis, Solache, Stefani

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-0-4
YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache
ABS, ABST OR NV: Hoover, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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CONSULTANT: Ethan Jones / ELECTIONS / (916) 319-2094 FN: 0003593