CALIFORNIA COMMON CAUSE

CITIZENS WORKING FOR BETTER GOVERNMENT

May 15, 2001

The Honorable John Burton
State Capitol Room 205
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 34 -- Support as proposed to be amended

Dear Senate President Pro Tem Burton:

California Common Cause will support SB 34, as we understand it is proposed to be amended. As you know, California Common Cause strongly opposed Proposition 34 because it repealed stronger campaign finance provisions of Proposition 208 and replaced them with weaker provisions. However, now that Proposition 34 has been enacted, SB 34 makes several substantive improvements to what is now the law.

One of the most serious deficiencies of Proposition 34 is that, in redefining membership communications, political party mailings to its members are no longer to be considered contributions or independent expenditures, and therefore subject to less stringent reporting requirements. As a result, in the recent Los Angeles Mayor's race, the costs of party mailings on behalf of mayoral candidates were not disclosed prior to the election, as they would have been prior to Proposition 34. It is our understanding that SB 34 will be amended to correct this defect, which is an improvement that we would enthusiastically support.

As currently written, SB 34 would enhance disclosure of large contributions to candidates for statewide office and statewide ballot measure committees. As passed, Proposition 34 would require that contributions in excess of $1,000 made within 90 days of an election be disclosed electronically within 24 hours. SB 34 would extend this disclosure to contributions of $5,000 or more made outside of the 90 days prior to an election. Such enhanced disclosure will provide the public with important campaign finance data for statewide candidates and ballot measures.

Finally, SB 34 would tighten a loophole related to contributions to political parties for the benefit of candidates. The original language of Proposition 34 would have allowed a donor to contribute at the behest of a candidate an unlimited amount of funds to a political party for coordinated expenditures on behalf of that candidate. Although the provisions of the Political Reform Act as amended by Proposition 34 still allow unlimited contributions to a political party for expenditures on behalf of candidates, under SB 34 the contribution could no longer be made in coordination with the candidate. This is an improvement over the current situation.

California Common Cause appreciates being included in your efforts to craft this bill and your willingness to strengthen Proposition 34.

Sincerely,

Jim Knox
Executive Director

926 J Street, Suite 910, Sacramento, CA 95814 916/443-1792 • FAX 916/443-1897 • www.commoncause.org