

Political Parasites: How Scam PACs Cheat Us



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Foreword by Congresswoman Katie Porter

As a lifelong consumer advocate, I've never met anyone who likes to get cheated. Across party lines and other differences, we all want to be treated fairly and see those who cheat us held accountable.

In Congress, I have led the charge to crack down on an incendiary group of cheaters—"scam PACs." Scam political action committees (PACs) are abusing loopholes in the law to steal from Americans who want to participate in our electoral process. These scam PACs are a perversion of democracy, destroying people's confidence in our election system and delegitimizing grassroots finance of campaigns.

Scam artists have moved from forming fake charities to forming PACs to solicit political funds from unsuspecting Americans because there are strict laws for the Internal Revenue Service to regulate fraudulent charities, but only weak laws for the Federal Election Commission (FEC) to regulate fraudulent PACs.

This is not a partisan issue. I agree with a high-ranking official at the Republican National Committee who has stated that "fraudulent political fundraising is a blight which threatens to undermine the integrity of our elections. It should not be tolerated."¹

The Federal Bureau of Investigation recently warned of an increase in reports of these fraudulent PACs.² As political communications ramp up for the 2024 election, scammers will increasingly take advantage of Americans who are just trying to make their voices heard.

Scam PAC operators will continue to successfully skirt the law and get away with theft until our campaign finance laws are updated. I've authored bipartisan legislation to tackle this problem that Congress should enact as soon as possible.

Each election cycle that passes without meaningful reform allows scam PACs to prey on Americans and chip away at our democracy. Congress must take action to protect the integrity of our democracy and the financial well-being of Americans.

Very truly yours,



Katie Porter


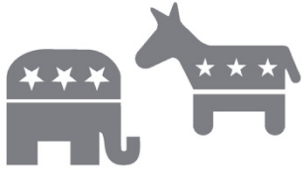


¹ Raymer, Matthew S. "Fraudulent Political Fundraising in the Age of Super PACs." *Syracuse L. Rev.* 66 (2016): 272.

² "Scam PACs Are on the Rise." FBI, April 15, 2021. <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/scam-pacs-are-on-the-rise-041521>.

What is a scam PAC?

Campaign Committees 101

To understand what a scam PAC is, it is helpful to know the different types of campaign committees that exist.^{3,4}

 <p>Candidate's Authorized Committee</p>	<p>When candidates run for Congress or for President, they are required to form an authorized committee, which is the candidate's designated vehicle to make expenditures and accept contributions.</p>
 <p>Political Party Committee</p>	<p>Political party committees, such as the Democratic National Committee or the Republican National Committee, similarly accept contributions and make expenditures on behalf of a party to influence federal elections.</p>
 <p>Corporations and Labor Organizations</p>	<p>Corporations and labor organizations can form a special kind of political committee called a separate segregated fund (SSF), commonly known as political action committees, or "PACs." These committees can collect contributions from corporate employees and members of labor unions to give to candidates and make expenditures.</p>
 <p>Nonconnected Committees</p>	<p>Nonconnected committees are PACs formed without any connection to a candidate, political party, corporation, or labor organization. These committees can do all the same things that SSFs can do, but they are freestanding, without a corporate or labor affiliation.</p>

³ "Guides." FEC. Accessed October 25, 2023. <https://www.fec.gov/help-candidates-and-committees/guides/>.

⁴ Clip Art sourced from The Noun Project, attributions in order of appearance: Vectors Points; Jaime Serra; Rediffusion; andika; IconMark.

Characteristics of a Scam PAC

Nonconnected committees are the organizational entities that fraudsters form to operate a scam PAC, but not all nonconnected committees are scam PACs. While the term 'scam PAC' is not legally defined, the Federal Election Commission (FEC), the agency charged with enforcing campaign finance law, views scam PACs as nonconnected committees that meet two criteria.⁵

First, scam PACs mislead contributors by using most of their contributions to pay for high operating expenses, delivering little to no money for whoever their solicitations had promised to support. Instead of using contributions to support candidates or political causes as pledged, the operators of scam PACs spend most of the money they raise to pay their own salaries. They perpetually fundraise for their own expenses—often masked as consulting or fundraising services—but make few to no political contributions. Whereas legitimate campaign committees spend money to raise money that can be used during an election season to accomplish their goals, scam PACs continually burn through donations on personal compensation and never-ending solicitations. Donors are hoodwinked into giving money to political committees that have no intention of furthering their donors' political views.

Second, scam PACs often make large disbursements to related vendors in which their managers have financial interests. The people running scam PACs often pay for services from political consulting firms or advertising vendors that they also run and profit from. This nefarious behavior diverges from how legitimate nonconnected committees typically disburse their funds—whether that is to hire field program staff, place media buys, or otherwise pay for something to directly influence the outcome of an election. By funneling money from one entity to another, scam PAC operators further their primary goal of self-enrichment while adding no value to the political conversation or electoral system.

Former FEC Chair Ann M. Ravel explained how the process can play out in real life:

"Here's how the scam works: **An urgent email, which often includes the name and photo of a well-known politician, asks that you "sign a petition" and then makes a request for a small contribution.** Using the money raised through the urgent email plea, a scam political action committee pays a consulting firm—owned by the scam PAC's treasurer—that then uses the funds to generate more emails and letters and raise more money.

Because of the way the requests are portrayed, it is assumed the money raised will go to help elect or defeat that candidate. **In reality, the money**

⁵ "Legislative Recommendations of the Federal Election Commission 2022." FEC (December 16, 2022): 8-9. <https://www.fec.gov/resources/cms-content/documents/legrec2022.pdf>.

raised largely gets funneled into the pockets of the political operatives who set up these organizations."⁶

One of the most notable scam PACs is the Conservative Majority Fund, which raised almost \$10 million from 2012-2019, but only \$48,400 of that sum went to political candidates and committees.⁷ Less than 1% of the dollars donated went to achieving a conservative majority, as advertised in solicitations to their donors. Instead of using contributions to aid conservative causes, the operators enriched themselves. Similarly, the Lincoln Project, a PAC that purportedly worked to prevent the re-election of Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election, duped many liberals into thinking their donations would effectively aid Joe Biden's candidacy. Of the \$87 million that the group raised, at least \$27 million went to one of the founder's consulting firms, from which the group's founders were lavishly compensated.⁸ An additional \$13.3 million was directed to another contractor, which provided further pay to at least one of the group's founders.⁹

Fellow Conservative,

Thank you so very much for your support of Conservative StrikeForce.

Because of you, we have been able to contribute **more than \$15,000.00** directly to Ken Cuccinelli's campaign, launch thousands of get-out-the-vote phone calls on his behalf, and hire the best election law attorney available in case of voter fraud issues.

We have done almost everything there is to do to help Ken.

Now, it is all about turning out the conservative vote.

I am concerned as I write this email that Republican turnout is low. Many of our best precincts are running well behind the turnout levels we need in order for Ken to win.

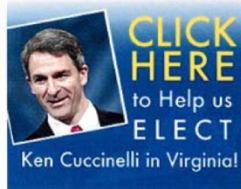
Get Out the Vote is the **most important thing we can do to achieve victory, which is why I must ask for your immediate help one more time.**

I am prepared to launch an aggressive last minute GOTV drive if StrikeForce can raise the sufficient emergency funds.

It is now 3 pm, and I must raise at least \$4,375.00 by 5 pm so we can launch a last-minute batch of GOTV phone calls into crucial Republican precincts.

That will give these voters 2 hours to get to the polls and help Ken win this election.

StrikeForce has spent **all available resources** to help Ken win. You obviously understand that we cannot risk a deficit going into next year's election when we will elect enough conservative Senators to remove Harry Reid as Majority Leader.



[So, I must come to you at this late hour and ask for one more special contribution right now.](#)

I have **3 hours** to raise these funds. The calls **must** start at 5 pm if we are to effectively remind Republicans to go to the polls.

[Will you help?](#)

Thank you for all you've done in this crucial campaign. Let's bring home a win!



For America,



Dennis Whitfield
Chairman, Conservative StrikeForce PAC



In this example from federal court filings, the Conservative Strikeforce PAC claimed to have contributed \$15,000 to a candidate's campaign, which never happened.

⁶ Ravel, Ann M. "Stopping Scam PACs From Ripping Off Donors." Roll Call, July 13, 2015.

<https://rollcall.com/2015/07/13/stopping-scam-pacs-from-ripping-off-donors-commentary/>.

⁷ Severns, Maggie, and Derek Willis. "How Conservative Operatives Steered Millions in PAC Donations to Themselves." Politico, July 26, 2019. <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/07/26/conservative-majority-fund-political-fundraising-pac-kelley-rogers-1428260>.

⁸ Hakim, Danny, Maggie Astor, and Jo Becker. "Inside the Lincoln Project's Secrets, Side Deals and Scandals." The New York Times, March 8, 2021.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/08/us/politics/lincoln-project-weaver.html>.

⁹ Ibid.

Donors are cheated when they contribute to advance a cause or candidate, and their money goes to line the pockets of political consultants. In this sense, scam PACs are no less harmful than fake charities, online sales that fail to deliver the promised product, or a downpayment toward a service that is never completed. This is theft, plain and simple. Collectively, Americans lose billions of dollars each year to scams.

Who do scam PACs harm?

If scam PACs only harmed the donors they cheated, then at least their harm would be limited to the fraction of Americans who make contributions.¹⁰ The truth, however, is that harm to donors is just the most visible problem. **Scam PACs create systemic harms that reverberate through our democracy.** These deceptive entities cast a shadow over our political institutions—undermining our electoral system, representative governance, and civic engagement.

Candidates

Scam PACs hurt candidates because these sham entities divert cash away from candidate committees. Campaigns have grown dramatically in cost, and candidates who cannot raise resources will not be able to get their messages to voters and win. As FEC Commissioner Ellen L. Weintraub and former Commissioner Ravel have noted, “authorized political committees . . . are outraged that Scam PACs are using their candidates’ or organizations’ names to siphon off funds intended to aid their efforts.”¹¹ Even if campaign finance reforms limited the influence of dark, unlimited, or big money in politics, candidate committees increasingly run on the small-dollar donations that scam PACs solicit.

When scam PACs divert donations from authorized candidate committees, candidates must focus more time, energy, and money on fundraising to make up for their losses. This redirects their focus away from listening to, meeting with, and

“All Americans benefit when our political leaders comprise a diversity of backgrounds, including socioeconomic statuses.”

organizing voters. Candidates who cannot afford to self-fund their campaigns with personal wealth or lack connections to wealthy donors through personal or professional networks rely on donations to fuel their campaigns. **If scam PACs are allowed to continue undercutting our political campaign process with impunity, then it will grow even harder for candidates from working- and middle-class backgrounds to break through in competitive races.** All Americans benefit when our political leaders comprise a diversity

¹⁰ “Donor Demographics.” OpenSecrets. Accessed October 25, 2023.

<https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/donor-demographics>.

¹¹ Commissioners Ellen L. Weintraub and Ann M. Ravel, Memorandum to the Commission: Proposal to Attack Scam PACs, September 26, 2016. https://www.fec.gov/resources/about-fec/commissioners/weintraub/statements/2016-09_Memo--Scam-PACs.pdf.

of backgrounds, including socioeconomic statuses, because they are best suited to craft policy that reflects the lived experience of most Americans. Allowing scam PACs to further limit elected office to just the wealthy and well-connected will worsen our politics and our policies, especially on issues affecting lower-income communities.

Political Discourse

The increased competition that candidates face from scam PACs for donations contributes to a degradation in the tenor of political messaging. **Legitimate campaign committees may be enticed or pressured to “imitate the incendiary fundraising tactics that many scam PACs . . . have successfully fine-tuned to cash in on donor outrage.”**¹² Ramping up extreme partisan rhetoric and manipulative fundraising tactics has enabled fundraising consultants to haul in quick money, but the long-term consequence is the distortion of political dialogue that makes it harder for future candidates to earn voters' trust. The lack of solicitation standards in a campaign finance system with scam PACs “may lead to an overall dilution of substantive, policy-oriented discourse in campaign messaging that informs the electorate and enhances accountability.”¹³ In essence, scam PACs are creating a race to the bottom that is harming us all.

Voters

When grassroots donors observe scam PACs abusing their contributions, they can become disillusioned with the election process, increasingly reluctant to politically engage, or unwilling to donate again in the future.¹⁴ Small-dollar donors choosing to exit from political participation “may threaten to undo recent progress in the diversification of the donor pool and increase inequality in participation in campaign finance.”¹⁵ **Scam PACs, however, do not only foster apathy among the donors who fall victim to their deceptive practices. They also contribute to a broader sense of disillusionment among all voters—even those who have never contributed to any campaign or cause.**

“ Nearly three-quarters of American adults favor limits on the amount of money spent in elections. ”

The disdain may stem from the perception of a campaign finance system riddled with corruption. Nearly three-quarters of American adults favor limits on the amount of money spent in elections, and think lobbyists and special interest groups have too much influence on members of

¹² Li, Zhao. "Lemons in the Political Marketplace: A Big-Data Approach to Detect 'Scam PACs'." Princeton University (June 13, 2022): 7.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Severns, "How Conservative Operatives Steered Millions in PAC Donations to Themselves."

¹⁵ Li, "Lemons in the Political Marketplace: A Big-Data Approach to Detect 'Scam PACs'," 7-8.

Congress.¹⁶ When asked to rate how effective several forms of civic engagement were, less than half of respondents expressed confidence in voting being able to change the country for the better, and that number dwindled to a meager 13% with regard to donating money to a political candidate or party.¹⁷ The grifting of scam PACs only reinforces these negative views.

While voter participation has increased in recent years, the United States still lags most developed democracies.¹⁸ This reduced civic engagement significantly hinders citizens' ability to hold their elected representatives accountable. When fewer people meaningfully participate in the democratic process, the integrity of our democracy is further jeopardized. Washington insiders and special interests grow more powerful when ordinary people do not turn out to vote. The power of corporate and wealthy donors grows when regular Americans cease small-dollar contributions.

Older Americans

Across the board, con artists target older Americans for the scams they run, and scam PACs have followed the same playbook. A substantial number of the people who got scammed by the Conservative Majority PAC turned out to be older Americans.¹⁹ Older Americans are more likely to make political donations than younger Americans, following a pattern of higher political engagement such as voting at higher rates than young people.²⁰

This dynamic is particularly troubling as many older Americans are financially vulnerable, relying on fixed incomes, retirement savings, and Social Security benefits. Making a political contribution can be a real sacrifice, and those who unknowingly donate to a scam PAC do so to their financial detriment without any benefit for the cause or the candidate they were trying to support. AARP has specifically warned its members to watch out for scam PACs, underscoring older Americans' vulnerability to deceptive fundraising appeals and the need to protect them from scam PACs.²¹

¹⁶ Pew Research Center. "Americans' Dismal Views of the Nation's Politics," September 19, 2023. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/09/19/money-power-and-the-influence-of-ordinary-people-in-american-politics/>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Nishizawa, Lyon. "How Does U.S. Voter Turnout Compare to the Rest of the World's?" Council on Foreign Relations, August 24, 2022. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-does-us-voter-turnout-compare-rest-worlds>.

¹⁹ Willis, Derek, and Maggie Severns. "How Fundraisers Convinced Conservatives to Donate \$10 Million — Then Kept Almost All of It." ProPublica and Politico. July 26, 2019. <https://www.propublica.org/article/conservative-majority-fund-political-fundraising-pac-kelley-rogers>.

²⁰ Pew Research Center. "5 facts about U.S. political donations," May 17, 2017. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2017/05/17/5-facts-about-u-s-political-donations/>.

²¹ AARP. "Political Fundraising Scams Aim to Steal Your Donation," November 16, 2021. <https://www.aarp.org/money/scams-fraud/info-2020/political.html>.

Veterans

Scam PACs also take advantage of veterans by co-opting the causes that help servicemembers make the transition back to civilian life. Through promising to help veterans with job training, mental health services, or housing programs, fraudsters capitalize on Americans' patriotism and exploit their willingness to support causes related to military service. Consequently, veterans are left without the assistance that the fundraising solicitation had promised to deliver.

For instance, the American Veterans Initiative PAC, which vowed to champion veterans dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicidal thoughts, disbursed \$691,000 in the first half of 2021, and every penny went to administrative costs.²² No actual veteran in need of help received a dime of the funds.

Why aren't scam PACs being held accountable?

In his scholarly article "Lemons in the Political Marketplace: A Big-Data Approach to Detect 'Scam PACs,'" Princeton University Professor Zhao Li points out the levels of accountability that exist between actors within the campaign finance system. Candidates have a level of accountability to the voters who elect them to office and the donors who help fund their campaigns. Similarly, political consultants and campaign vendors are accountable to the candidates who hire them for their services. Like hired professionals in other industries, they have to deliver the results that their clients paid them for to stay in business. However, this concept of accountability breaks down when applied to the relationship between non-connected PACs and their donors. There is essentially no way for donors to punish PACs that scam them—they need the government to intervene.

Legal Loopholes

The FEC has informed Congress for years that it cannot effectively crack down on fraudulent campaign activity because there are too many holes in our campaign finance law. **Former Chair Ravel explained that the FEC "shockingly . . . can't stop these scam artists," warning that until "Congress takes action and gives the FEC the tools to regulate scam PACs, we can expect this problem to grow."**²³

The Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) of 1971 is the primary federal law regulating campaign finance. While this landmark law strengthened transparency and accountability in our political process, it contains vulnerabilities that scam PACs are exploiting. **For example, FECA section 30124 regarding fraudulent**

²² Everson, Zach. "Scam PACs? Two Groups Claim To Support Vets And Cops While Blowing All Their Money On Administrative Fees." Forbes, July 29, 2021.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/zacheverson/2021/07/29/scam-pacs-two-groups-claim-to-support-vets-and-cops-while-blowing-all-their-money-on-administrative-fees/>.

²³ Ravel, "Stopping Scam PACs from Ripping off Donors."

misrepresentation of campaign authority “only applies to prohibit actions by federal candidates and their employees or agents,”²⁴ meaning it does not cover the nonconnected PACs that fraudsters create to run scams. In addition to the statute not stopping PACs from perpetrating fraud, it also does not protect legitimate PACs from being the subjects of fraud. The statute prohibits fraudulent misrepresentation or solicitation on behalf of a candidate or political party, but says nothing about falsely claiming to represent another trusted, established PAC.

Section 30124 also only prohibits fraudulent misrepresentation “to the extent it is ‘damaging’ to the party fraudulently misrepresented.”²⁵ This extra requirement to prove damage further limits the scope of the law and makes it more difficult for the FEC to apply because the harm may not be considered significant enough or the party misrepresented may not have been the opponent.²⁶ The lack of consequences for scam PACs is not for the FEC’s lack of interest or effort; its hands are simply tied by an outdated law.

Some individuals running scam PACs have been brought to justice, including the operator of the Conservative Majority Fund who received a prison sentence for his years of grifting.²⁷ However, federal prosecutors only obtained a conviction because the operator committed wire fraud. Prosecutors most likely opted not to pursue charges for fraudulent misrepresentation of campaign authority because they knew that the statute is not effective. Some states have strong anti-fraud laws, providing aggrieved parties and law enforcement with another avenue for convicting scammers. Federal law is woefully inadequate, which is why scam PACs thrive.

Lack of Standards

The operating standards for nonconnected committees are insufficient, which is another law that the FEC has requested Congress to clarify. For example, a nonconnected committee can redirect 90% of its raised contributions into vendors owned by the committee’s operator without running afoul of the law so long as it is disclosing its contributions and expenditures to the commission as required. This is an extraordinarily high level of expenditure going to non-political activity. While “a scam PAC might disclose a payment to a particular vendor, [it] would not be required to disclose that the PAC’s officers owned the vendor or the amount of work the vendor actually produced.”²⁸ Commissioners Weintraub and Ravel shared that “the law provides political committees with great leeway on how they use the funds. So the power of the Commission to directly and comprehensively protect political

²⁴ Raymer, “Fraudulent Political Fundraising in the Age of Super PACs,” 246.

²⁵ Raymer, “Fraudulent Political Fundraising in the Age of Super PACs,” 247.

²⁶ “Legislative Recommendations of the Federal Election Commission 2022,” 10.

²⁷ United States Attorney’s Office Eastern District of Virginia. “Political Consultant Sentenced for Fraud Involving Scam PACs.” United States Department of Justice, January 17, 2020.

<https://www.justice.gov/usao-edva/pr/political-consultant-sentenced-fraud-involving-scam-pacs>.

²⁸ Raymer, “Fraudulent Political Fundraising in the Age of Super PACs,” 263.

contributors is limited."²⁹ **Because registering with the FEC and meeting the minimum reporting requirements are just about all it takes to remain compliant with the law while running a scam PAC, "scam artists are better off hiding in plain sight."**³⁰

Partisan Gridlock

Fixing our broken campaign finance system has become one of the most politically divisive issues facing Congress. Even when there are bipartisan solutions to problems plaguing the interests of both parties, there is apprehension and distrust that prevents progress across the aisle on campaign finance. Perhaps it is due to many congressmembers' resistance to changing the rules governing corporate PAC and lobbyist contributions that most Democrats and Republicans rely on. What remains particularly confounding, however, is continued resistance to implementing solutions with bipartisan support, such as regulating scam PACs. Perhaps some elected officials fear that a crackdown on scam PACs could prompt enforcement against sketchy fundraising techniques—like fake triple matches—that their own campaigns use. Digital fundraising has become an exceedingly lucrative industry with its own clout inside Washington circles. Ultimately, Congress' unwillingness to touch campaign finance issues is preventing commonsense reform on scam PACs.

Ultimately, Congress's unwillingness to touch campaign finance issues is preventing common sense reform on scam PACs.

How can scam PACs be defeated?

Close Loopholes for Fraudulent Misrepresentation (*Stop Scam PACs Act*)

To hold scam PACs accountable, Congress needs to fix the glaring loopholes in the law that let bad actors get away with fraud. No one should be able to hijack our political process by lying about who they represent. Congresswoman Porter's bipartisan *Stop Scam PACs Act*, co-led by Rep. Dan Crenshaw (R-TX), would broaden the statute for fraudulent misrepresentation of campaign authority so the FEC can bring scam PAC operators to justice. Specifically, it would remove the onerous requirement to prove the fraud is damaging to another candidate or political party, expand the prohibition of fraud to encompass all PACs, and make the statute apply to everyone—not just federal candidates and their employees. **This bill borrows the legislative language that all Democratic and Republican FEC commissioners unanimously endorsed in 2022—it should be a no-brainer to sign into law.**³¹

²⁹ Weintraub and Ravel, "Memorandum to the Commission: Proposal to Attack Scam PACs."

³⁰ Raymer, "Fraudulent Political Fundraising in the Age of Super PACs," 260.

³¹ "Legislative Recommendations of the Federal Election Commission 2022," 10-11.

Set Spending Standards for Nonconnected Committees (SCAM PAC Act)

Congress must also answer the FEC's request to create stricter standards for nonconnected PAC authority and spending. **Congresswoman Porter's Stopping Corrupt Actors from Making Political Action Committees (SCAM PAC) Act would prevent nonconnected committees that are not spending a majority of funds on legitimate expenditures from being able to disburse funds to any entity that has a financial interest or familial connection to the committee's operators.** This narrowly tailored approach limits the disbursement restriction solely to the nonconnected PACs that are not meeting spending standards. Focusing this restriction furthers the government's interest in preventing fraud and self-dealing in elections while respecting constitutional protections for genuine political speech. All Americans who want to participate in our political process, regardless of party or ideology, should be protected from con artists trying to take advantage of them.

Enforce Campaign Finance and Consumer Protection Laws

Right now, the onus is on Congress to do its part and give the FEC the tools it needs to rein in scam PACs. **When Congress does eventually deliver much needed campaign finance reform, scam PACs will only face punishment if the FEC enforces the law.** As a commission that is equally split between Republicans and Democrats, the FEC has historically struggled to collectively agree on how to perform its responsibilities. Former Chair Ravel previously stated "the likelihood of the laws being enforced is slim," describing the FEC as "worse than dysfunctional."³²

Like with any federal agency, Congress must fulfill its constitutional duty and conduct oversight of the FEC, holding it to account for following and enforcing the law. Since theft is not an exercise of protected First Amendment political rights, the FEC should dutifully carry out any law regulating scam PACs that Congress passes. Both Congress and the FEC must work hand-in-hand to punish people running scam PACs and restore confidence in our campaign finance system.

Conclusion

Scam PACs are a sickness to our democracy, and their growing prevalence is a symptom of our institutions' underlying weaknesses. If left untreated, their harm will continue to fester. Strengthening our democracy will require Congress to rewrite the campaign finance rulebook, empower regulators to root out cheaters who corrupt our electoral process, and conduct oversight into how laws are working in real life. Congress must clamp down on scam PACs to protect our democracy for us all.

³² Lichtblau, Eric. "F.E.C. Can't Curb 2016 Election Abuse, Commission Chief Says." The New York Times, May 2, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/03/us/politics/fec-cant-curb-2016-election-abuse-commission-chief-says.html>.

How can donors protect their dollars in our democracy?

- **Watch Out For**
 - **Disingenuous Tactics:** While not exclusive to scam PACs, fake hourly fundraising goals, promises to match donations, and automatically pre-checked boxes for recurring donations are all warning signs that should give donors pause.
 - **Misleading Names:** Scam PACs will often choose names that sound very similar to legitimate, well-known, established political fundraising groups. Look closely to make sure the name is correct.
 - **Fake Charities:** If a PAC sounds like a charity, then it could be a red flag. Real charities are regulated by the IRS—not the FEC—and cannot engage in partisan political activities.
- **Verify**
 - **Registration:** Search for the PAC on FEC.gov. If it is not registered, then it is suspicious and probably illegal.
 - **Expenditures:** Look up how the PAC is spending its money on FEC.gov or OpenSecrets.org. PACs that spend most of their money on fundraising and administrative costs instead of contributions to candidates or election activities could be scams.
 - **Vendors:** Check which groups the PAC is conducting business with on FEC.gov or OpenSecrets.org. If the vendors are associated with the PAC operators or use the same registration address, then the PAC may be a scam.
 - **Operators:** Legitimate PACs should have working websites with the contact information for PAC operators. If the phone number listed is out of service, that could be a sign of a scam PAC.
- **Report**
 - **FBI:** If a PAC appears fraudulent, contact a local FBI field office and ask to speak to an election crimes coordinator.
 - **FEC:** Even if the FEC cannot take action, it needs to know of the problem.
 - **State Attorneys General:** Some states have anti-fraud laws that may apply.