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Chapter 4

Constitutional Law and US Commerce

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Explain the historical importance and basic structure of the US Constitution.
2. Know what judicial review is and what it represents in terms of the separation of powers between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government.
3. Locate the source of congressional power to regulate the economy under the Constitution, and explain what limitations there are to the reach of congressional power over interstate commerce.
4. Describe the different phases of congressional power over commerce, as adjudged by the US Supreme Court over time.
5. Explain what power the states retain over commerce, and how the Supreme Court may sometimes limit that power.
6. Describe how the Supreme Court, under the supremacy clause of the Constitution, balances state and federal laws that may be wholly or partly in conflict.
7. Explain how the Bill of Rights relates to business activities in the United States.

1. The power the Supreme Court has to say what the US Constitution means. Because the Constitution speaks in broad terms, the interpretations of the Supreme Court as to the meaning of its provisions define what the Constitution means. The Constitution can only be changed by amendment or by further interpretation by the Supreme Court.

The US Constitution is the foundation for all of US law. Business and commerce are directly affected by the words, meanings, and interpretations of the Constitution. Because it speaks in general terms, its provisions raise all kinds of issues for scholars, lawyers, judges, politicians, and commentators. For example, arguments still rage over the nature and meaning of “federalism,” the concept that there is shared governance between the states and the federal government. The US Supreme Court is the ultimate arbiter of those disputes, and as such it has a unique role in the legal system. It has assumed the power of **judicial review**¹, unique among federal systems globally, through which it can strike down federal or state statutes that it believes violate the Constitution and can even void the president’s executive orders if they are contrary to the Constitution’s language. No knowledgeable citizen or businessperson can afford to be ignorant of its basic provisions.

4.1 Basic Aspects of the US Constitution

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the American values that are reflected in the US Constitution.
2. Know what federalism means, along with separation of powers.
3. Explain the process of amending the Constitution and why judicial review is particularly significant.

The Constitution as Reflecting American Values

In the US, the one document to which all public officials and military personnel pledge their unswerving allegiance is the Constitution. If you serve, you are asked to “support and defend” the Constitution “against all enemies, foreign and domestic.” The oath usually includes a statement that you swear that this oath is taken freely, honestly, and without “any purpose of evasion.” This loyalty oath may be related to a time—fifty years ago—when “un-American” activities were under investigation in Congress and the press; the fear of communism (as antithetical to American values and principles) was paramount. As you look at the Constitution and how it affects the legal environment of business, please consider what basic values it may impart to us and what makes it uniquely American and worth defending “against all enemies, foreign and domestic.”

In Article I, the Constitution places the legislature first and prescribes the ways in which representatives are elected to public office. Article I balances influence in the federal legislature between large states and small states by creating a Senate in which the smaller states (by population) as well as the larger states have two votes. In Article II, the Constitution sets forth the powers and responsibilities of the branch—the presidency—and makes it clear that the president should be the commander in chief of the armed forces. Article II also gives states rather than individuals (through the Electoral College) a clear role in the election process. Article III creates the federal judiciary, and the Bill of Rights, adopted in 1791, makes clear that individual rights must be preserved against activities of the federal government. In general, the idea of rights is particularly strong.

The Constitution itself speaks of rights in fairly general terms, and the judicial interpretation of various rights has been in flux. The “right” of a person to own another person was notably affirmed by the Supreme Court in the *Dred Scott* decision in 1857. In *Scott v. Sanford* (the Dred Scott decision), the court states that

Scott should remain a slave, that as a slave he is not a citizen of the United States and thus not eligible to bring suit in a federal court, and that as a slave he is personal property and thus has never been free. The “right” of a child to freely contract for long, tedious hours of work was upheld by the court in *Hammer v. Dagenhart* in 1918. Both decisions were later repudiated, just as the decision that a woman has a “right” to an abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy could later be repudiated if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned by the Supreme Court. *Roe v. Wade*, 410 US 113 (1973).

General Structure of the Constitution

Look at the Constitution. Notice that there are seven articles, starting with Article I (legislative powers), Article II (executive branch), and Article III (judiciary). Notice that there is no separate article for administrative agencies. The Constitution also declares that it is “the supreme Law of the Land” (Article VI). Following Article VII are the ten amendments adopted in 1791 that are referred to as the Bill of Rights. Notice also that in 1868, a new amendment, the Fourteenth, was adopted, requiring states to provide “due process” and “equal protection of the laws” to citizens of the United States.

Federalism

The partnership created in the Constitution between the states and the federal government is called **federalism**². The Constitution is a document created by the states in which certain powers are delegated to the national government, and other powers are reserved to the states. This is made explicit in the Tenth Amendment.

Separation of Powers and Judicial Review

Because the Founding Fathers wanted to ensure that no single branch of the government, especially the executive branch, would be ascendant over the others, they created various checks and balances to ensure that each of the three principal branches had ways to limit or modify the power of the others. This is known as the **separation of powers**³. Thus the president retains veto power, but the House of Representatives is entrusted with the power to initiate spending bills.

Power sharing was evident in the basic design of Congress, the federal legislative branch. The basic power imbalance was between the large states (with greater population) and the smaller ones (such as Delaware). The smaller ones feared a loss of sovereignty if they could be outvoted by the larger ones, so the federal legislature was constructed to guarantee two Senate seats for every state, no matter how small. The Senate was also given great responsibility in ratifying treaties and

2. The idea, built into the structure of the Constitution, that states and the federal government have concurrent powers. In effect, federalism is the concept of shared governance between the states and the federal government.

3. In the original design of the Constitution, the executive, legislative, and judicial branches were all given powers that could modify or limit the powers of the other branches of government. For example, the president wields a veto power over congressional legislation.

judicial nominations. The net effect of this today is that senators from a very small number of states can block treaties and other important legislation. The power of small states is also magnified by the Senate's cloture rule, which currently requires sixty out of one hundred senators to vote to bring a bill to the floor for an up-or-down vote.

Because the Constitution often speaks in general terms (with broad phrases such as "due process" and "equal protection"), reasonable people have disagreed as to how those terms apply in specific cases. The United States is unique among industrialized democracies in having a Supreme Court that reserves for itself that exclusive power to interpret what the Constitution means. The famous case of *Marbury v. Madison* began that tradition in 1803, when the Supreme Court had marginal importance in the new republic. The decision in *Bush v. Gore*, decided in December of 2000, illustrates the power of the court to shape our destiny as a nation. In that case, the court overturned a ruling by the Florida Supreme Court regarding the way to proceed on a recount of the Florida vote for the presidency. The court's ruling was purportedly based on the "equal protection of the laws" provision in the Fourteenth Amendment.

From *Marbury* to the present day, the Supreme Court has articulated the view that the US Constitution sets the framework for all other US laws, whether statutory or judicially created. Thus any statute (or portion thereof) or legal ruling (judicial or administrative) in conflict with the Constitution is not enforceable. And as the *Bush v. Gore* decision indicates, the states are not entirely free to do what they might choose; their own sovereignty is limited by their union with the other states in a federal sovereign.

If the Supreme Court makes a "bad decision" as to what the Constitution means, it is not easily overturned. Either the court must change its mind (which it seldom does) or two-thirds of Congress and three-fourths of the states must make an amendment (Article V).

Because the Supreme Court has this power of judicial review, there have been many arguments about how it should be exercised and what kind of "philosophy" a Supreme Court justice should have. President Richard Nixon often said that a Supreme Court justice should "strictly construe" the Constitution and not add to its language. Finding law in the Constitution was "judicial activism" rather than "judicial restraint." The general philosophy behind the call for "strict constructionist" justices is that legislatures make laws in accord with the wishes of the majority, and so unelected judges should not make law according to their own views and values. Nixon had in mind the 1960s Warren court, which "found" rights in the Constitution that were not specifically mentioned—the right of privacy, for

example. In later years, critics of the Rehnquist court would charge that it “found” rights that were not specifically mentioned, such as the right of states to be free from federal antidiscrimination laws. See, for example, *Kimel v. Florida Board of Regents*, or the *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* case ([Section 4.6.5](#)), which held that corporations are “persons” with “free speech rights” that include spending unlimited amounts of money in campaign donations and political advocacy. *Kimel v. Florida Board of Regents*, 528 US 62 (2000).

Because *Roe v. Wade* has been so controversial, this chapter includes a seminal case on “the right of privacy,” *Griswold v. Connecticut*, [Section 4.6.1](#). Was the court correct in recognizing a “right of privacy” in *Griswold*? This may not seem like a “business case,” but consider: the manufacture and distribution of birth control devices is a highly profitable (and legal) business in every US state. Moreover, *Griswold* illustrates another important and much-debated concept in US constitutional law: substantive due process (see [Section 4.5.3 "Fifth Amendment"](#)). The problem of judicial review and its proper scope is brought into sharp focus in the abortion controversy. Abortion became a lucrative service business after *Roe v. Wade* was decided in 1973. That has gradually changed, with state laws that have limited rather than overruled *Roe v. Wade* and with persistent antiabortion protests, killings of abortion doctors, and efforts to publicize the human nature of the fetuses being aborted. The key here is to understand that there is no *explicit* mention in the Constitution of any right of privacy. As Justice Harry Blackmun argued in his majority opinion in *Roe v. Wade*,

The Constitution does not explicitly mention any right of privacy. In a line of decisions, however, the Court has recognized that a right of personal privacy or a guarantee of certain areas or zones of privacy, does exist under the Constitution....[T]hey also make it clear that the right has some extension to activities relating to marriage...procreation...contraception...family relationships...and child rearing and education....The right of privacy...is broad enough to encompass a woman’s decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy.

In short, justices interpreting the Constitution wield quiet yet enormous power through judicial review. In deciding that the right of privacy applied to a woman’s decision to abort in the first trimester, the Supreme Court did not act on the basis of a popular mandate or clear and unequivocal language in the Constitution, and it made illegal any state or federal legislative or executive action contrary to its interpretation. Only a constitutional amendment or the court’s repudiation of *Roe v. Wade* as a precedent could change that interpretation.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The Constitution gives voice to the idea that people have basic rights and that a civilian president is also the commander in chief of the armed forces. It gives instructions as to how the various branches of government must share power and also tries to balance power between the states and the federal government. It does not expressly allow for judicial review, but the Supreme Court's ability to declare what laws are (or are not) constitutional has given the judicial branch a kind of power not seen in other industrialized democracies.

EXERCISES

1. Suppose the Supreme Court declares that Congress and the president cannot authorize the indefinite detention of terrorist suspects without a trial of some sort, whether military or civilian. Suppose also that the people of the United States favor such indefinite detention and that Congress wants to pass a law rebuking the court's decision. What kind of law would have to be passed, by what institutions, and by what voting percentages?
2. When does a prior decision of the Supreme Court deserve overturning? Name one decision of the Supreme Court that you think is no longer "good law." Does the court have to wait one hundred years to overturn its prior case precedents?

4.2 The Commerce Clause

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Name the specific clause through which Congress has the power to regulate commerce. What, specifically, does this clause say?
2. Explain how early decisions of the Supreme Court interpreted the scope of the commerce clause and how that impacted the legislative proposals and programs of Franklin Delano Roosevelt during the Great Depression.
3. Describe both the wider use of the commerce clause from World War II through the 1990s and the limitations the Supreme Court imposed in *Lopez* and other cases.

First, turn to Article I, Section 8. The **commerce clause**⁴ gives Congress the exclusive power to make laws relating to foreign trade and commerce and to commerce among the various states. Most of the federally created legal environment springs from this one clause: if Congress is not authorized in the Constitution to make certain laws, then it acts unconstitutionally and its actions may be ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. Lately, the Supreme Court has not been shy about ruling acts of Congress unconstitutional.

Here are the first five parts of Article I, Section 8, which sets forth the powers of the federal legislature. The commerce clause is in boldface. It is short, but most federal legislation affecting business depends on this very clause:

Section 8

[Clause 1] The Congress shall have Power To lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defence and general Welfare of the United States; but all Duties, Imposts and Excises shall be uniform throughout the United States;

[Clause 2] To borrow Money on the credit of the United States;

[Clause 3] To regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes;

4. Article I, Section 8, of the US Constitution is generally regarded as the legal authority by which the federal government can make law that governs commerce among the states and with foreign nations.

[Clause 4] To establish a uniform Rule of Naturalization, and uniform Laws on the subject of Bankruptcies throughout the United States;

[Clause 5] To coin Money, regulate the Value thereof, and of foreign Coin, and fix the Standard of Weights and Measures;

Early Commerce Clause Cases

For many years, the Supreme Court was very strict in applying the commerce clause: Congress could only use it to legislate aspects of the movement of goods from one state to another. Anything else was deemed local rather than national. For example, In *Hammer v. Dagenhart*, decided in 1918, a 1916 federal statute had barred transportation in interstate commerce of goods produced in mines or factories employing children under fourteen or employing children fourteen and above for more than eight hours a day. A complaint was filed in the US District Court for the Western District of North Carolina by a father in his own behalf and on behalf of his two minor sons, one under the age of fourteen years and the other between fourteen and sixteen years, who were employees in a cotton mill in Charlotte, North Carolina. The father's lawsuit asked the court to enjoin (block) the enforcement of the act of Congress intended to prevent interstate commerce in the products of child labor.

The Supreme Court saw the issue as whether Congress had the power under the commerce clause to control interstate shipment of goods made by children under the age of fourteen. The court found that Congress did not. The court cited several cases that had considered what interstate commerce could be constitutionally regulated by Congress. In *Hipolite Egg Co. v. United States*, the Supreme Court had sustained the power of Congress to pass the Pure Food and Drug Act, which prohibited the introduction into the states by means of interstate commerce impure foods and drugs. *Hipolite Egg Co. v. United States*, 220 US 45 (1911). In *Hoke v. United States*, the Supreme Court had sustained the constitutionality of the so-called White Slave Traffic Act of 1910, whereby the transportation of a woman in interstate commerce for the purpose of prostitution was forbidden. In that case, the court said that Congress had the power to protect the channels of interstate commerce: "If the facility of interstate transportation can be taken away from the demoralization of lotteries, the debasement of obscene literature, the contagion of diseased cattle or persons, the impurity of food and drugs, the like facility can be taken away from the systematic enticement to, and the enslavement in prostitution and debauchery of women, and, more insistently, of girls." *Hoke v. United States*, 227 US 308 (1913).

In each of those instances, the Supreme Court said, “[T]he use of interstate transportation was necessary to the accomplishment of harmful results.” In other words, although the power over interstate transportation was to regulate, that could only be accomplished by prohibiting the use of the facilities of interstate commerce to effect the evil intended. But in *Hammer v. Dagenhart*, that essential element was lacking. The law passed by Congress aimed to standardize among all the states the ages at which children could be employed in mining and manufacturing, while the goods themselves are harmless. Once the labor is done and the articles have left the factory, the “labor of their production is over, and the mere fact that they were intended for interstate commerce transportation does not make their production subject to federal control under the commerce power.”

In short, the early use of the commerce clause was limited to the movement of physical goods between states. Just because something might enter the channels of interstate commerce later on does not make it a fit subject for national regulation. The production of articles intended for interstate commerce is a matter of local regulation. The court therefore upheld the result from the district and circuit court of appeals; the application of the federal law was enjoined. Goods produced by children under the age of fourteen could be shipped anywhere in the United States without violating the federal law.

From the New Deal to the New Frontier and the Great Society:1930s–1970

During the global depression of the 1930s, the US economy saw jobless rates of a third of all workers, and President Roosevelt’s New Deal program required more active federal legislation. Included in the New Deal program was the recognition of a “right” to form labor unions without undue interference from employers. Congress created the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) in 1935 to investigate and to enjoin employer practices that violated this right.

In *NLRB v. Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation*, a union dispute with management at a large steel-producing facility near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, became a court case. In this case, the NLRB had charged the Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation with discriminating against employees who were union members. The company’s position was that the law authorizing the NLRB was unconstitutional, exceeding Congress’s powers. The court held that the act was narrowly constructed so as to regulate industrial activities that had the potential to restrict interstate commerce. The earlier decisions under the commerce clause to the effect that labor relations had only an indirect effect on commerce were effectively reversed. Since the ability of employees to engage in collective bargaining (one activity protected by the act) is “an essential condition of industrial peace,” the national government was justified

in penalizing corporations engaging in interstate commerce that “refuse to confer and negotiate” with their workers. This was, however, a close decision, and the switch of one justice made this ruling possible. Without this switch, the New Deal agenda would have been effectively derailed.

The Substantial Effects Doctrine: World War II to the 1990s

Subsequent to *NLRB v. Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation*, Congress and the courts generally accepted that even modest impacts on interstate commerce were “reachable” by federal legislation. For example, the case of *Wickard v. Filburn*, from 1942, represents a fairly long reach for Congress in regulating what appear to be very local economic decisions ([Section 4.6.2](#)).

Wickard established that “substantial effects” in interstate commerce could be very local indeed! But commerce clause challenges to federal legislation continued. In the 1960s, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was challenged on the ground that Congress lacked the power under the commerce clause to regulate what was otherwise fairly local conduct. For example, Title II of the act prohibited racial discrimination in public accommodations (such as hotels, motels, and restaurants), leading to the famous case of *Katzenbach v. McClung* (1964).

Ollie McClung’s barbeque place in Birmingham, Alabama, allowed “colored” people to buy takeout at the back of the restaurant but not to sit down with “white” folks inside. The US attorney sought a court order to require Ollie to serve all races and colors, but Ollie resisted on commerce clause grounds: the federal government had no business regulating a purely local establishment. Indeed, Ollie did not advertise nationally, or even regionally, and had customers only from the local area. But the court found that some 42 percent of the supplies for Ollie’s restaurant had moved in the channels of interstate commerce. This was enough to sustain federal regulation based on the commerce clause. *Katzenbach v. McClung*, 379 US 294 (1964).

For nearly thirty years following, it was widely assumed that Congress could almost always find some interstate commerce connection for any law it might pass. It thus came as something of a shock in 1995 when the Rehnquist court decided *U.S. v. Lopez*. Lopez had been convicted under a federal law that prohibited possession of firearms within 1,000 feet of a school. The law was part of a twenty-year trend (roughly 1970 to 1990) for senators and congressmen to pass laws that were tough on crime. Lopez’s lawyer admitted that Lopez had had a gun within 1,000 feet of a San Antonio school yard but challenged the law itself, arguing that Congress exceeded its authority under the commerce clause in passing this legislation. The US government’s Solicitor General argued on behalf of the Department of Justice to the Supreme Court that Congress was within its constitutional rights under the

commerce clause because education of the future workforce was the foundation for a sound economy and because guns at or near school yards detracted from students' education. The court rejected this analysis, noting that with the government's analysis, an interstate commerce connection could be conjured from almost anything. Lopez went free because the law itself was unconstitutional, according to the court.

Congress made no attempt to pass similar legislation after the case was decided. But in passing subsequent legislation, Congress was often careful to make a record as to why it believed it was addressing a problem that related to interstate commerce. In 1994, Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), having held hearings to establish why violence against women on a local level would impair interstate commerce. In 1994, while enrolled at Virginia Polytechnic Institute (Virginia Tech), Christy Brzonkala alleged that Antonio Morrison and James Crawford, both students and varsity football players at Virginia Tech, had raped her. In 1995, Brzonkala filed a complaint against Morrison and Crawford under Virginia Tech's sexual assault policy. After a hearing, Morrison was found guilty of sexual assault and sentenced to immediate suspension for two semesters. Crawford was not punished. A second hearing again found Morrison guilty. After an appeal through the university's administrative system, Morrison's punishment was set aside, as it was found to be "excessive." Ultimately, Brzonkala dropped out of the university. Brzonkala then sued Morrison, Crawford, and Virginia Tech in federal district court, alleging that Morrison's and Crawford's attack violated 42 USC Section 13981, part of the VAWA), which provides a federal civil remedy for the victims of gender-motivated violence. Morrison and Crawford moved to dismiss Brzonkala's suit on the ground that Section 13981's civil remedy was unconstitutional. In dismissing the complaint, the district court found that that Congress lacked authority to enact Section 13981 under either the commerce clause or the Fourteenth Amendment, which Congress had explicitly identified as the sources of federal authority for the VAWA. Ultimately, the court of appeals affirmed, as did the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court held that Congress lacked the authority to enact a statute under the commerce clause or the Fourteenth Amendment because the statute did not regulate an activity that substantially affected interstate commerce nor did it redress harm caused by the state. Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist wrote for the court that "under our federal system that remedy must be provided by the Commonwealth of Virginia, and not by the United States." Dissenting, Justice Stephen G. Breyer argued that the majority opinion "illustrates the difficulty of finding a workable judicial Commerce Clause touchstone." Justice David H. Souter, dissenting, noted that VAWA contained a "mountain of data assembled by Congress...showing the effects of violence against women on interstate commerce."

The absence of a workable judicial commerce clause touchstone remains. In 1996, California voters passed the Compassionate Use Act, legalizing marijuana for medical use. California's law conflicted with the federal Controlled Substances Act (CSA), which banned possession of marijuana. After the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) seized doctor-prescribed marijuana from a patient's home, a group of medical marijuana users sued the DEA and US Attorney General John Ashcroft in federal district court.

The medical marijuana users argued that the CSA—which Congress passed using its constitutional power to regulate interstate commerce—exceeded Congress's commerce clause power. The district court ruled against the group, but the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed and ruled the CSA unconstitutional because it applied to medical marijuana use solely within one state. In doing so, the Ninth Circuit relied on *U.S. v. Lopez* (1995) and *U.S. v. Morrison* (2000) to say that using medical marijuana did not “substantially affect” interstate commerce and therefore could not be regulated by Congress.

But by a 6–3 majority, the Supreme Court held that the commerce clause gave Congress authority to prohibit the local cultivation and use of marijuana, despite state law to the contrary. Justice John Paul Stevens argued that the court's precedents established Congress's commerce clause power to regulate purely local activities that are part of a “class of activities” with a substantial effect on interstate commerce. The majority argued that Congress could ban local marijuana use because it was part of such a class of activities: the national marijuana market. Local use affected supply and demand in the national marijuana market, making the regulation of intrastate use “essential” to regulating the drug's national market.

Notice how similar this reasoning is to the court's earlier reasoning in *Wickard v. Filburn* ([Section 4.6.2](#)). In contrast, the court's conservative wing was adamant that federal power had been exceeded. Justice Clarence Thomas's dissent in *Gonzalez v. Raich* stated that Raich's local cultivation and consumption of marijuana was not “Commerce...among the several States.” Representing the “originalist” view that the Constitution should mostly mean what the Founders meant it to mean, he also said that in the early days of the republic, it would have been unthinkable that Congress could prohibit the local cultivation, possession, and consumption of marijuana.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The commerce clause is the basis on which the federal government regulates interstate economic activity. The phrase “interstate commerce” has been subject to differing interpretations by the Supreme Court over the past one hundred years. There are certain matters that are essentially local or intrastate, but the range of federal involvement in local matters is still considerable.

EXERCISES

1. Why would Congress have power under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to require restaurants and hotels to not discriminate against interstate travelers on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, or national origin? Suppose the Holiday Restaurant near I-80 in Des Moines, Iowa, has a sign that says, “We reserve the right to refuse service to any Muslim or person of Middle Eastern descent.” Suppose also that the restaurant is very popular locally and that only 40 percent of its patrons are travelers on I-80. Are the owners of the Holiday Restaurant in violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964? What would happen if the owners resisted enforcement by claiming that Title II of the act (relating to “public accommodations” such as hotels, motels, and restaurants) was unconstitutional?
2. If the Supreme Court were to go back to the days of *Hammer v. Dagenhart* and rule that only goods and services involving interstate movement could be subject to federal law, what kinds of federal programs might be lacking a sound basis in the commerce clause? “Obamacare”? Medicare? Homeland security? Social Security? What other powers are granted to Congress under the Constitution to legislate for the general good of society?

4.3 Dormant Commerce Clause

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand that when Congress does not exercise its powers under the commerce clause, the Supreme Court may still limit state legislation that discriminates against interstate commerce or places an undue burden on interstate commerce.
2. Distinguish between “discrimination” dormant-commerce-clause cases and “undue burden” dormant-commerce-clause cases.

Congress has the power to legislate under the commerce clause and often does legislate. For example, Congress might say that trucks moving on interstate highways must not be more than seventy feet in length. But if Congress does not exercise its powers and regulate in certain areas (such as the size and length of trucks on interstate highways), states may make their own rules. States may do so under the so-called historic police powers of states that were never yielded up to the federal government.

These police powers can be broadly exercised by states for purposes of health, education, welfare, safety, morals, and the environment. But the Supreme Court has reserved for itself the power to determine when state action is excessive, even when Congress has not used the commerce clause to regulate. This power is claimed to exist in the **dormant commerce clause**⁵.

There are two ways that a state may violate the dormant commerce clause. If a state passes a law that is an “undue burden” on interstate commerce or that “discriminates” against interstate commerce, it will be struck down. *Kassel v. Consolidated Freightways*, in [Section 4.7 "Summary and Exercises"](#), is an example of a case where Iowa imposed an undue burden on interstate commerce by prohibiting double trailers on its highways. *Kassell v. Consolidated Freightways*, 450 US 662 (1981). Iowa’s prohibition was judicially declared void when the Supreme Court judged it to be an undue burden.

5. Even when the federal government does not act to make rules to govern matters of interstate commerce, the states may (using their police powers), but they may not do so in ways that unduly burden or discriminate against interstate commerce.

Discrimination cases such as *Hunt v. Washington Apple Advertising Commission* ([Section 4.6 "Cases"](#)) pose a different standard. The court has been fairly inflexible here: if one state discriminates in its treatment of any article of commerce based on its state of origin, the court will strike down the law. For example, in *Oregon Waste Systems v. Department of Environmental Quality*, the state wanted to place a slightly

higher charge on waste coming from out of state. *Oregon Waste Systems v. Department of Environmental Quality*, 511 US 93 (1994). The state's reasoning was that in-state residents had already contributed to roads and other infrastructure and that tipping fees at waste facilities should reflect the prior contributions of in-state companies and residents. Out-of-state waste handlers who wanted to use Oregon landfills objected and won their dormant commerce clause claim that Oregon's law discriminated "on its face" against interstate commerce. Under the Supreme Court's rulings, anything that moves in channels of interstate commerce is "commerce," even if someone is paying to get rid of something instead of buying something.

Thus the states are bound by Supreme Court decisions under the dormant commerce clause to do nothing that differentiates between articles of commerce that originate from within the state from those that originate elsewhere. If Michigan were to let counties decide for themselves whether to take garbage from outside of the county or not, this could also be a discrimination based on a place of origin outside the state. (Suppose, for instance, each county were to decide not to take waste from outside the county; then all Michigan counties would effectively be excluding waste from outside of Michigan, which is discriminatory.) *Fort Gratiot Sanitary Landfill v. Michigan Dep't of Natural Resources*, 504 US 353 (1992).

The Supreme Court probably would uphold any solid waste requirements that did not differentiate on the basis of origin. If, for example, all waste had to be inspected for specific hazards, then the law would apply equally to in-state and out-of-state garbage. Because this is the dormant commerce clause, Congress could still act (i.e., it could use its broad commerce clause powers) to say that states are free to keep out-of-state waste from coming into their own borders. But Congress has declined to do so. What follows is a statement from one of the US senators from Michigan, Carl Levin, in 2003, regarding the significant amounts of waste that were coming into Michigan from Toronto, Canada.

Dealing with Unwelcome Waste

Senator Carl Levin, January 2003

Michigan is facing an intolerable situation with regard to the importation of waste from other states and Canada.

Canada is the largest source of waste imports to Michigan. Approximately 65 truckloads of waste come in to Michigan per day from Toronto alone, and an estimated 110–130 trucks come in from Canada each day.

This problem isn't going to get any better. Ontario's waste shipments are growing as the Toronto area signs new contracts for waste disposal here and closes its two remaining landfills. At the beginning of 1999, the Toronto area was generating about 2.8 million tons of waste annually, about 700,000 tons of which were shipped to Michigan. By early this year, barring unforeseen developments, the entire 2.8 million tons will be shipped to Michigan for disposal.

Why can't Canada dispose of its trash in Canada? They say that after 20 years of searching they have not been able to find a suitable Ontario site for Toronto's garbage. Ontario has about 345,000 square miles compared to Michigan's 57,000 square miles. With six times the land mass, that argument is laughable.

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality estimates that, for every five years of disposal of Canadian waste at the current usage volume, Michigan is losing a full year of landfill capacity. The environmental impacts on landfills, including groundwater contamination, noise pollution and foul odors, are exacerbated by the significant increase in the use of our landfills from sources outside of Michigan.

I have teamed up with Senator Stabenow and Congressman Dingell to introduce legislation that would strengthen our ability to stop shipments of waste from Canada.

We have protections contained in a 17 year-old international agreement between the U.S. and Canada called the Agreement Concerning the

Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Waste. The U.S. and Canada entered into this agreement in 1986 to allow the shipment of hazardous waste across the U.S./Canadian border for treatment, storage or disposal. In 1992, the two countries decided to add municipal solid waste to the agreement. To protect both countries, the agreement requires notification of shipments to the importing country and it also provides that the importing country may withdraw consent for shipments. Both reasons are evidence that these shipments were intended to be limited. However, the agreement's provisions have not been enforced by the United States.

Canada could not export waste to Michigan without the 1986 agreement, but the U.S. has not implemented the provisions that are designed to protect the people of Michigan. Although those of us that introduced this legislation believe that the Environmental Protection Agency has the authority to enforce this agreement, they have not done so. Our bill would require the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] to enforce the agreement.

In order to protect the health and welfare of the citizens of Michigan and our environment, we must consider the impact of the importation of trash on state and local recycling efforts, landfill capacity, air emissions, road deterioration resulting from increased vehicular traffic and public health and the environment.

Our bill would require the EPA to consider these factors in determining whether to accept imports of trash from Canada. It is my strong view that such a review should lead the EPA to say "no" to the status quo of trash imports.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Where Congress does not act pursuant to its commerce clause powers, the states are free to legislate on matters of commerce under their historic police powers. However, the Supreme Court has set limits on such powers. Specifically, states may not impose undue burdens on interstate commerce and may not discriminate against articles in interstate commerce.

EXERCISES

1. Suppose that the state of New Jersey wishes to limit the amount of hazardous waste that enters into its landfills. The general assembly in New Jersey passes a law that specifically forbids any hazardous waste from entering into the state. All landfills are subject to tight regulations that will allow certain kinds of hazardous wastes originating in New Jersey to be put in New Jersey landfills but that impose significant criminal fines on landfill operators that accept out-of-state hazardous waste. The Baldessari Brothers Landfill in Linden, New Jersey, is fined for taking hazardous waste from a New York State transporter and appeals that ruling on the basis that New Jersey's law is unconstitutional. What is the result?
2. The state of Arizona determines through its legislature that trains passing through the state cannot be longer than seventy cars. There is some evidence that in Eastern US states longer trains pose some safety hazards. There is less evidence that long trains are a problem in Western states. Several major railroads find the Arizona legislation costly and burdensome and challenge the legislation after applied-for permits for longer trains are denied. What kind of dormant commerce clause challenge is this, and what would it take for the challenge to be successful?

4.4 Preemption: The Supremacy Clause

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the role of the supremacy clause in the balance between state and federal power.
2. Give examples of cases where state legislation is preempted by federal law and cases where state legislation is not preempted by federal law.

When Congress does use its power under the commerce clause, it can expressly state that it wishes to have exclusive regulatory authority. For example, when Congress determined in the 1950s to promote nuclear power (“atoms for peace”), it set up the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and provided a limitation of liability for nuclear power plants in case of a nuclear accident. The states were expressly told to stay out of the business of regulating nuclear power or the movement of nuclear materials. Thus Rochester, Minnesota, or Berkeley, California, could declare itself a nuclear-free zone, but the federal government would have preempted such legislation. If Michigan wished to set safety standards at Detroit Edison’s Fermi II nuclear reactor that were more stringent than the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s standards, Michigan’s standards would be preempted and thus be void.

Even where Congress does not expressly preempt state action, such action may be impliedly pre-empted. States cannot constitutionally pass laws that interfere with the accomplishment of the purposes of the federal law. Suppose, for example, that Congress passes a comprehensive law that sets standards for foreign vessels to enter the navigable waters and ports of the United States. If a state creates a law that sets standards that conflict with the federal law or sets standards so burdensome that they interfere with federal law, the doctrine of **preemption** will (in accordance with the supremacy clause) void the state law or whatever parts of it are inconsistent with federal law.

But Congress can allow what might appear to be inconsistencies; the existence of federal statutory standards does not always mean that local and state standards cannot be more stringent. If California wants cleaner air or water than other states, it can set stricter standards—nothing in the Clean Water Act or Clean Air Act forbids the state from setting stricter pollution standards. As the auto industry well knows, California has set stricter standards for auto emissions. Since the 1980s,

most automakers have made both a federal car and a California car, because federal Clean Air Act emissions restrictions do not preempt more rigorous state standards.

Large industries and companies actually prefer regulation at the national level. It is easier for a large company or industry association to lobby in Washington, DC, than to lobby in fifty different states. Accordingly, industry often asks Congress to put preemptive language into its statutes. The tobacco industry is a case in point.

The cigarette warning legislation of the 1960s (where the federal government required warning labels on cigarette packages) effectively preempted state negligence claims based on failure to warn. When the family of a lifetime smoker who had died sued in New Jersey court, one cause of action was the company's failure to warn of the dangers of its product. The Supreme Court reversed the jury's award based on the federal preemption of failure to warn claims under state law. *Cipollone v. Liggett Group*, 505 US 504 (1993).

The Supremacy Clause

Article VI

This Constitution, and the Laws of the United States which shall be made in Pursuance thereof; and all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the Authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land; and the Judges in every State shall be bound thereby, any Thing in the Constitution or Laws of any State to the Contrary notwithstanding.

The **preemption**⁶ doctrine derives from the supremacy clause of the Constitution, which states that the "Constitution and the Laws of the United States...shall be the supreme Law of the Land...any Thing in the Constitutions or Laws of any State to the Contrary notwithstanding." This means of course, that *any* federal law—even a regulation of a federal agency—would control over *any* conflicting state law.

6. Based on the supremacy clause, the preemption doctrine holds that state and federal laws that conflict must yield to the superior law, which is federal law.

Preemption can be either express or implied. When Congress chooses to expressly preempt state law, the only question for courts becomes determining whether the challenged state law is one that the federal law is intended to preempt. Implied preemption presents more difficult issues. The court has to look beyond the express language of federal statutes to determine whether Congress has "occupied the field" in which the state is attempting to regulate, or whether a state law directly

conflicts with federal law, or whether enforcement of the state law might frustrate federal purposes.

Federal “occupation of the field” occurs, according to the court in *Pennsylvania v. Nelson* (1956), when there is “no room” left for state regulation. Courts are to look to the pervasiveness of the federal scheme of regulation, the federal interest at stake, and the danger of frustration of federal goals in making the determination as to whether a challenged state law can stand.

In *Silkwood v. Kerr-McGee* (1984), the court, voting 5–4, found that a \$10 million punitive damages award (in a case litigated by famed attorney Gerry Spence) against a nuclear power plant was not impliedly preempted by federal law. Even though the court had recently held that state regulation of the safety aspects of a federally licensed nuclear power plant was preempted, the court drew a different conclusion with respect to Congress’s desire to displace state tort law—even though the tort actions might be premised on a violation of federal safety regulations.

Cipollone v. Liggett Group (1993) was a closely watched case concerning the extent of an express preemption provision in two cigarette labeling laws of the 1960s. The case was a wrongful death action brought against tobacco companies on behalf of Rose Cipollone, a lung cancer victim who had started smoking cigarette in the 1940s. The court considered the preemptive effect on state law of a provision that stated, “No requirement based on smoking and health shall be imposed under state law with respect to the advertising and promotion of cigarettes.” The court concluded that several types of state tort actions were preempted by the provision but allowed other types to go forward.

KEY TAKEAWAY

In cases of conflicts between state and federal law, federal law will preempt (or control) state law because of the supremacy clause. Preemption can be express or implied. In cases where preemption is implied, the court usually finds that compliance with both state and federal law is not possible or that a federal regulatory scheme is comprehensive (i.e., “occupies the field”) and should not be modified by state actions.

EXERCISES

1. For many years, the United States engaged in discussions with friendly nations as to the reciprocal use of ports and harbors. These discussions led to various multilateral agreements between the nations as to the configuration of oceangoing vessels and how they would be piloted. At the same time, concern over oil spills in Puget Sound led the state of Washington to impose fairly strict standards on oil tankers and requirements for the training of oil tanker pilots. In addition, Washington's state law imposed many other requirements that went above and beyond agreed-upon requirements in the international agreements negotiated by the federal government. Are the Washington state requirements preempted by federal law?
2. The Federal Arbitration Act of 1925 requires that all contracts for arbitration be treated as any other contract at common law. Suppose that the state of Alabama wishes to protect its citizens from a variety of arbitration provisions that they might enter into unknowingly. Thus the legislation provides that all predispute arbitration clauses be in bold print, that they be of twelve-point font or larger, that they be clearly placed within the first two pages of any contract, and that they have a separate signature line where the customer, client, or patient acknowledges having read, understood, and signed the arbitration clause in addition to any other signatures required on the contract. The legislation does preserve the right of consumers to litigate in the event of a dispute arising with the product or service provider; that is, with this legislation, consumers will not unknowingly waive their right to a trial at common law. Is the Alabama law preempted by the Federal Arbitration Act?

4.5 Business and the Bill of Rights

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand and describe which articles in the Bill of Rights apply to business activities and how they apply.
2. Explain the application of the Fourteenth Amendment—including the due process clause and the equal protection clause—to various rights enumerated in the original Bill of Rights.

We have already seen the Fourteenth Amendment's application in *Burger King v. Rudzewicz* ([Section 3.9 "Cases"](#)). In that case, the court considered whether it was constitutionally correct for a court to assert personal jurisdiction over a nonresident. The states cannot constitutionally award a judgment against a nonresident if doing so would offend traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice. Even if the state's long-arm statute would seem to allow such a judgment, other states should not give it full faith and credit (see Article V of the Constitution). In short, a state's long-arm statute cannot confer personal jurisdiction that the state cannot constitutionally claim.

The Bill of Rights (the first ten amendments to the Constitution) was originally meant to apply to federal actions only. During the twentieth century, the court began to apply selected rights to state action as well. So, for example, federal agents were prohibited from using evidence seized in violation of the Fourth Amendment, but state agents were not, until *Mapp v. Ohio* (1960), when the court applied the guarantees (rights) of the Fourth Amendment to state action as well. In this and in similar cases, the Fourteenth Amendment's due process clause was the basis for the court's action. The due process clause commanded that states provide due process in cases affecting the life, liberty, or property of US citizens, and the court saw in this command certain "fundamental guarantees" that states would have to observe. Over the years, most of the important guarantees in the Bill of Rights came to apply to state as well as federal action. The court refers to this process as selective incorporation.

Here are some very basic principles to remember:

1. The guarantees of the Bill of Rights apply *only* to state and federal government action. They do not limit what a company or person in the private sector may do. For example, states may not impose censorship

on the media or limit free speech in a way that offends the First Amendment, but your boss (in the private sector) may order you not to talk to the media.

2. In some cases, a private company may be regarded as participating in “state action.” For example, a private defense contractor that gets 90 percent of its business from the federal government has been held to be public for purposes of enforcing the constitutional right to free speech (the company had a rule barring its employees from speaking out in public against its corporate position). It has even been argued that public regulation of private activity is sufficient to convert the private into public activity, thus subjecting it to the requirements of due process. But the Supreme Court rejected this extreme view in 1974 when it refused to require private power companies, regulated by the state, to give customers a hearing before cutting off electricity for failure to pay the bill. *Jackson v. Metropolitan Edison Co.*, 419 US 345 (1974).
3. States have rights, too. While “states rights” was a battle cry of Southern states before the Civil War, the question of what balance to strike between state sovereignty and federal union has never been simple. In *Kimel v. Florida*, for example, the Supreme Court found in the words of the Eleventh Amendment a basis for declaring that states may not have to obey certain federal statutes.

First Amendment

In part, the First Amendment states that “Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press.” The Founding Fathers believed that democracy would work best if people (and the press) could talk or write freely, without governmental interference. But the First Amendment was also not intended to be as absolute as it sounded. Oliver Wendell Holmes’s famous dictum that the law does not permit you to shout “Fire!” in a crowded theater has seldom been answered, “But why not?” And no one in 1789 thought that defamation laws (torts for slander and libel) had been made unconstitutional. Moreover, because the apparent purpose of the First Amendment was to make sure that the nation had a continuing, vigorous debate over matters political, political speech has been given the highest level of protection over such other forms of speech as (1) “commercial speech,” (2) speech that can and should be limited by reasonable “time, place, and manner” restrictions, or (3) obscene speech.

Because of its higher level of protection, political speech can be false, malicious, mean-spirited, or even a pack of lies. A public official in the United States must be prepared to withstand all kinds of false accusations and cannot succeed in an action for defamation unless the defendant has acted with “malice” and “reckless

disregard” of the truth. Public figures, such as CEOs of the largest US banks, must also be prepared to withstand accusations that are false. In any defamation action, truth is a defense, but a defamation action brought by a public figure or public official must prove that the defendant not only has his facts wrong but also lies to the public in a malicious way with reckless disregard of the truth. Celebrities such as Lindsay Lohan and Jon Stewart have the same burden to go forward with a defamation action. It is for this reason that the *National Enquirer* writes exclusively about public figures, public officials, and celebrities; it is possible to say many things that aren’t completely true and still have the protection of the First Amendment.

Political speech is so highly protected that the court has recognized the right of people to support political candidates through campaign contributions and thus promote the particular viewpoints and speech of those candidates. Fearing the influence of money on politics, Congress has from time to time placed limitations on corporate contributions to political campaigns. But the Supreme Court has had mixed reactions over time. Initially, the court recognized the First Amendment right of a corporation to donate money, subject to certain limits. *Buckley v. Valeo*, 424 US 1 (1976). In another case, *Austin v. Michigan Chamber of Commerce* (1990), the Michigan Campaign Finance Act prohibited corporations from using treasury money for independent expenditures to support or oppose candidates in elections for state offices. But a corporation could make such expenditures if it set up an independent fund designated solely for political purposes. The law was passed on the assumption that “the unique legal and economic characteristics of corporations necessitate some regulation of their political expenditures to avoid corruption or the appearance of corruption.”

The Michigan Chamber of Commerce wanted to support a candidate for Michigan’s House of Representatives by using general funds to sponsor a newspaper advertisement and argued that as a nonprofit organization, it was not really like a business firm. The court disagreed and upheld the Michigan law. Justice Marshall found that the chamber was akin to a business group, given its activities, linkages with community business leaders, and high percentage of members (over 75 percent) that were business corporations. Furthermore, Justice Marshall found that the statute was narrowly crafted and implemented to achieve the important goal of maintaining integrity in the political process. But as you will see in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (Section 4.6 "Cases"), *Austin* was overruled; corporations are recognized as “persons” with First Amendment political speech rights that cannot be impaired by Congress or the states without some compelling governmental interest with restrictions on those rights that are “narrowly tailored.”

Fourth Amendment

The Fourth Amendment says, “all persons shall be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects from unreasonable searches and seizures, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, before a magistrate and upon Oath, specifically describing the persons to be searched and places to be seized.”

The court has read the Fourth Amendment to prohibit only those government searches or seizures that are “unreasonable.” Because of this, businesses that are in an industry that is “closely regulated” can be searched more frequently and can be searched without a warrant. In one case, an auto parts dealer at a junkyard was charged with receiving stolen auto parts. Part of his defense was to claim that the search that found incriminating evidence was unconstitutional. But the court found the search reasonable, because the dealer was in a “closely regulated industry.”

In the 1980s, Dow Chemical objected to an overflight by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA had rented an airplane to fly over the Midland, Michigan, Dow plant, using an aerial mapping camera to photograph various pipes, ponds, and machinery that were not covered by a roof. Because the court’s precedents allowed governmental intrusions into “open fields,” the EPA search was ruled constitutional. Because the literal language of the Fourth Amendment protected “persons, houses, papers, and effects,” anything searched by the government in “open fields” was reasonable. (The court’s opinion suggested that if Dow had really wanted privacy from governmental intrusion, it could have covered the pipes and machinery that were otherwise outside and in open fields.)

Note again that constitutional guarantees like the Fourth Amendment apply to governmental action. Your employer or any private enterprise is not bound by constitutional limits. For example, if drug testing of all employees every week is done by government agency, the employees may have a cause of action to object based on the Fourth Amendment. However, if a private employer begins the same kind of routine drug testing, employees have no constitutional arguments to make; they can simply leave that employer, or they may pursue whatever statutory or common-law remedies are available.

Fifth Amendment

The Fifth Amendment states, “No person shall be...deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.”

The Fifth Amendment has three principal aspects: **procedural due process**⁷, the **takings clause**⁸, and **substantive due process**⁹. In terms of procedural due process, the amendment prevents government from arbitrarily taking the life of a criminal defendant. In civil lawsuits, it is also constitutionally essential that the proceedings be fair. This is why, for example, the defendant in *Burger King v. Rudzewicz* had a serious constitutional argument, even though he lost.

The takings clause of the Fifth Amendment ensures that the government does not take private property without just compensation. In the international setting, governments that take private property engage in what is called expropriation. The standard under customary international law is that when governments do that, they must provide prompt, adequate, and effective compensation. This does not always happen, especially where foreign owners' property is being expropriated. The guarantees of the Fifth Amendment (incorporated against state action by the Fourteenth Amendment) are available to property owners where state, county, or municipal government uses the power of eminent domain to take private property for public purposes. Just what is a public purpose is a matter of some debate. For example, if a city were to condemn economically viable businesses or neighborhoods to construct a baseball stadium with public money to entice a private enterprise (the baseball team) to stay, is a public purpose being served?

7. In matters of civil or criminal procedure, the Constitution requires that both states and the federal government provide fair process (or due process) to all parties, especially defendants who are accused of a crime or, in a civil case, defendants who are served with a summons and complaint in a state other than their residence.

8. In the Fifth Amendment, the government is required to provide compensation to the owner for any taking of private property. The same requirement is imposed on states through the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (under selective incorporation).

9. A doctrine of the Supreme Court that negated numerous laws in the first third of the 20th century. Its use in the past 80 years is greatly diminished, but it survives in terms of protecting substantive liberties not otherwise enumerated in the Constitution.

In *Kelo v. City of New London*, Mrs. Kelo and other residents fought the city of New London, in its attempt to use powers of eminent domain to create an industrial park and recreation area that would have Pfizer & Co. as a principal tenant. *Kelo v. City of New London*, 545 US 469 (2005). The city argued that increasing its tax base was a sufficient public purpose. In a very close decision, the Supreme Court determined that New London's actions did not violate the takings clause. However, political reactions in various states resulted in a great deal of new state legislation that would limit the scope of public purpose in eminent domain takings and provide additional compensation to property owners in many cases.

In addition to the takings clause and aspects of procedural due process, the Fifth Amendment is also the source of what is called substantive due process. During the first third of the twentieth century, the Supreme Court often nullified state and federal laws using substantive due process. In 1905, for example, in *Lochner v. New York*, the Supreme Court voided a New York statute that limited the number of hours that bakers could work in a single week. New York had passed the law to protect the health of employees, but the court found that this law interfered with the basic constitutional right of private parties to freely contract with one another. Over the next thirty years, dozens of state and federal laws were struck down that aimed to improve working conditions, secure social welfare, or establish the rights of unions. However, in 1934, during the Great Depression, the court reversed itself and began upholding the kinds of laws it had struck down earlier.

Since then, the court has employed a two-tiered analysis of substantive due process claims. Under the first tier, legislation on economic matters, employment relations, and other business affairs is subject to minimal judicial scrutiny. This means that a law will be overturned only if it serves no rational government purpose. Under the second tier, legislation concerning fundamental liberties is subject to “heightened judicial scrutiny,” meaning that a law will be invalidated unless it is “narrowly tailored to serve a significant government purpose.”

The Supreme Court has identified two distinct categories of fundamental liberties. The first category includes most of the liberties expressly enumerated in the Bill of Rights. Through a process known as selective incorporation, the court has interpreted the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to bar states from denying their residents the most important freedoms guaranteed in the first ten amendments to the federal Constitution. Only the Third Amendment right (against involuntary quartering of soldiers) and the Fifth Amendment right to be indicted by a grand jury have not been made applicable to the states. Because these rights are still not applicable to state governments, the Supreme Court is often said to have “selectively incorporated” the Bill of Rights into the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

The second category of fundamental liberties includes those liberties that are not expressly stated in the Bill of Rights but that can be seen as essential to the concepts of freedom and equality in a democratic society. These unstated liberties come from Supreme Court precedents, common law, moral philosophy, and deeply rooted traditions of US legal history. The Supreme Court has stressed that the word *liberty* cannot be defined by a definitive list of rights; rather, it must be viewed as a rational continuum of freedom through which every aspect of human behavior is protected from arbitrary impositions and random restraints. In this regard, as the Supreme Court has observed, the due process clause protects abstract liberty interests, including the right to personal autonomy, bodily integrity, self-dignity, and self-determination.

These liberty interests often are grouped to form a general right to privacy, which was first recognized in *Griswold v. Connecticut* ([Section 4.6.1](#)), where the Supreme Court struck down a state statute forbidding married adults from using, possessing, or distributing contraceptives on the ground that the law violated the sanctity of the marital relationship. According to Justice Douglas’s plurality opinion, this penumbra of privacy, though not expressly mentioned in the Bill of Rights, must be protected to establish a buffer zone or breathing space for those freedoms that are constitutionally enumerated.

But substantive due process has seen fairly limited use since the 1930s. During the 1990s, the Supreme Court was asked to recognize a general right to die under the doctrine of substantive due process. Although the court stopped short of establishing such a far-reaching right, certain patients may exercise a constitutional liberty to hasten their deaths under a narrow set of circumstances. In *Cruzan v. Missouri Department of Health*, the Supreme Court ruled that the due process clause guarantees the right of competent adults to make advanced directives for the withdrawal of life-sustaining measures should they become incapacitated by a disability that leaves them in a persistent vegetative state. *Cruzan v. Missouri Department of Health*, 497 US 261 (1990). Once it has been established by clear and convincing evidence that a mentally incompetent and persistently vegetative patient made such a prior directive, a spouse, parent, or other appropriate guardian may seek to terminate any form of artificial hydration or nutrition.

Fourteenth Amendment: Due Process and Equal Protection Guarantees

The Fourteenth Amendment (1868) requires that states treat citizens of other states with due process. This can be either an issue of procedural due process (as in [Section 3.9 "Cases"](#), *Burger King v. Rudzewicz*) or an issue of substantive due process. For substantive due process, consider what happened in an Alabama court not too long ago. *BMW of North America, Inc. v. Gore*, 517 U.S. 559 (1996)

The plaintiff, Dr. Ira Gore, bought a new BMW for \$40,000 from a dealer in Alabama. He later discovered that the vehicle's exterior had been slightly damaged in transit from Europe and had therefore been repainted by the North American distributor prior to his purchase. The vehicle was, by best estimates, worth about 10 percent less than he paid for it. The distributor, BMW of North America, had routinely sold slightly damaged cars as brand new if the damage could be fixed for less than 3 percent of the cost of the car. In the trial, Dr. Gore sought \$4,000 in compensatory damages and also punitive damages. The Alabama trial jury considered that BMW was engaging in a fraudulent practice and wanted to punish the defendant for a number of frauds it estimated at somewhere around a thousand nationwide. The jury awarded not only the \$4,000 in compensatory damages but also \$4 million in punitive damages, which was later reduced to \$2 million by the Alabama Supreme Court. On appeal to the US Supreme Court, the court found that punitive damages may not be "grossly excessive." If they are, then they violate substantive due process. Whatever damages a state awards must be limited to what is reasonably necessary to vindicate the state's legitimate interest in punishment and deterrence.

"Equal protection of the laws" is a phrase that originates in the Fourteenth Amendment, adopted in 1868. The amendment provides that no state shall "deny to

any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” This is the equal protection clause. It means that, generally speaking, governments must treat people equally. Unfair classifications among people or corporations will not be permitted. A well-known example of unfair classification would be race discrimination: requiring white children and black children to attend different public schools or requiring “separate but equal” public services, such as water fountains or restrooms. Yet despite the clear intent of the 1868 amendment, “separate but equal” was the law of the land until *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 US 537 (1896).

Governments make classifications every day, so not all classifications can be illegal under the equal protection clause. People with more income generally pay a greater percentage of their income in taxes. People with proper medical training are licensed to become doctors; people without that training cannot be licensed and commit a criminal offense if they do practice medicine. To know what classifications are permissible under the Fourteenth Amendment, we need to know what is being classified. The court has created three classifications, and the outcome of any equal protection case can usually be predicted by knowing how the court is likely to classify the case:

- Minimal scrutiny: economic and social relations. Government actions are usually upheld if there is a rational basis for them.
- Intermediate scrutiny: gender. Government classifications are sometimes upheld.
- Strict scrutiny: race, ethnicity, and fundamental rights. Classifications based on any of these are almost never upheld.

Under minimal scrutiny for economic and social regulation, laws that regulate economic or social issues are presumed valid and will be upheld if they are rationally related to legitimate goals of government. So, for example, if the city of New Orleans limits the number of street vendors to some rational number (more than one but fewer than the total number that could possibly fit on the sidewalks), the local ordinance would not be overturned as a violation of equal protection.

Under intermediate scrutiny, the city of New Orleans might limit the number of street vendors who are men. For example, suppose that the city council decreed that all street vendors must be women, thinking that would attract even more tourism. A classification like this, based on sex, will have to meet a sterner test than a classification resulting from economic or social regulation. A law like this would have to substantially relate to important government objectives. Increasingly, courts have nullified government sex classifications as societal concern with gender

equality has grown. (See Shannon Faulkner's case against The Citadel, an all-male state school.) *United States v. Virginia*, 518 US 515 (1996).

Suppose, however, that the city of New Orleans decided that no one of Middle Eastern heritage could drive a taxicab or be a street vendor. That kind of classification would be examined with strict scrutiny to see if there was any compelling justification for it. As noted, classifications such as this one are almost never upheld. The law would be upheld only if it were necessary to promote a compelling state interest. Very few laws that have a racial or ethnic classification meet that test.

The strict scrutiny test will be applied to classifications involving racial and ethnic criteria as well as classifications that interfere with a fundamental right. In *Palmore v. Sidoti*, the state refused to award custody to the mother because her new spouse was racially different from the child. *Palmore v. Sidoti*, 466 US 429 (1984). This practice was declared unconstitutional because the state had made a racial classification; this was presumptively invalid, and the government could not show a compelling need to enforce such a classification through its law. An example of government action interfering with a fundamental right will also receive strict scrutiny. When New York State gave an employment preference to veterans who had been state residents at the time of entering the military, the court declared that veterans who were new to the state were less likely to get jobs and that therefore the statute interfered with the right to travel, which was deemed a fundamental right. *Atty. Gen. of New York v. Soto-Lopez*, 476 US 898 (1986).

KEY TAKEAWAY

The Bill of Rights, through the Fourteenth Amendment, largely applies to state actions. The Bill of Rights has applied to federal actions from the start. Both the Bill of Rights and the Fourteenth Amendment apply to business in various ways, but it is important to remember that the rights conferred are rights against governmental action and not the actions of private enterprise.

EXERCISES

1. John Hanks works at ProLogis. The company decides to institute a drug-testing policy. John is a good and longtime employee but enjoys smoking marijuana on the weekends. The drug testing will involve urine samples and, semiannually, a hair sample. It is nearly certain that the drug-testing protocol that ProLogis proposes will find that Hanks is a marijuana user. The company has made it clear that it will have zero tolerance for any kind of nonprescribed controlled substances. John and several fellow employees wish to go to court to challenge the proposed testing as “an unreasonable search and seizure.” Can he possibly succeed?
2. Larry Reed, majority leader in the Senate, is attacked in his reelection campaign by a series of ads sponsored by a corporation (Global Defense, Inc.) that does not like his voting record. The corporation is upset that Reed would not write a special provision that would favor Global Defense in a defense appropriations bill. The ads run constantly on television and radio in the weeks immediately preceding election day and contain numerous falsehoods. For example, in order to keep the government running financially, Reed found it necessary to vote for a bill that included a last-minute rider that defunded a small government program for the handicapped, sponsored by someone in the opposing party that wanted to privatize all programs for the handicapped. The ad is largely paid for by Global Defense and depicts a handicapped child being helped by the existing program and large letters saying “Does Larry Reed Just Not Care?” The ad proclaims that it is sponsored by Citizens Who Care for a Better Tomorrow. Is this protected speech? Why or why not? Can Reed sue for defamation? Why or why not?

4.6 Cases

Griswold v. Connecticut

Griswold v. Connecticut

381 U.S. 479 (U.S. Supreme Court 1965)

A nineteenth-century Connecticut law made the use, possession, or distribution of birth control devices illegal. The law also prohibited anyone from giving information about such devices. The executive director and medical director of a planned parenthood association were found guilty of giving out such information to a married couple that wished to delay having children for a few years. The directors were fined \$100 each.

They appealed throughout the Connecticut state court system, arguing that the state law violated (infringed) a basic or fundamental right of privacy of a married couple: to live together and have sex together without the restraining power of the state to tell them they may legally have intercourse but not if they use condoms or other birth control devices. At each level (trial court, court of appeals, and Connecticut Supreme Court), the Connecticut courts upheld the constitutionality of the convictions.

Plurality Opinion by Justice William O. Douglass

We do not sit as a super legislature to determine the wisdom, need, and propriety of laws that touch economic problems, business affairs, or social conditions. The [Connecticut] law, however, operates directly on intimate relation of husband and wife and their physician's role in one aspect of that relation.

[Previous] cases suggest that specific guarantees in the Bill of Rights have penumbras, formed by emanations from those guarantees that help give them life and substance.... Various guarantees create zones of privacy. The right of association contained in the penumbra of the First Amendment is one.... The Third Amendment in its prohibition against the quartering of soldiers "in any house" in time of peace without the consent of the owner is another facet of that privacy. The Fourth Amendment explicitly affirms the "right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures." The Fifth Amendment in its Self-Incrimination Clause enables the citizen to create a zone of privacy which the government may not force him to surrender to his detriment.

The Ninth Amendment provides: “The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.”

The Fourth and Fifth Amendments were described...as protection against all governmental invasions “of the sanctity of a man’s home and the privacies of life.” We recently referred in *Mapp v. Ohio*...to the Fourth Amendment as creating a “right to privacy, no less important than any other right carefully and particularly reserved to the people.”

[The law in question here], in forbidding the use of contraceptives rather than regulating their manufacture or sale, seeks to achieve its goals by having a maximum destructive impact on [the marital] relationship. Such a law cannot stand....Would we allow the police to search the sacred precincts of marital bedrooms for telltale signs of the use of contraceptives? The very idea is repulsive to the notions of privacy surrounding the marital relationship.

We deal with a right of privacy older than the Bill of Rights—older than our political parties, older than our school system. Marriage is a coming together for better or for worse, hopefully enduring, and intimate to the degree of being sacred. It is an association that promotes a way of life, not causes; a harmony in living, not political faiths; a bilateral loyalty, not commercial or social projects. Yet it is an association for as noble a purpose as any involved in our prior decisions.

Mr. Justice Stewart, whom Mr. Justice Black joins, dissenting.

Since 1879 Connecticut has had on its books a law which forbids the use of contraceptives by anyone. I think this is an uncommonly silly law. As a practical matter, the law is obviously unenforceable, except in the oblique context of the present case. As a philosophical matter, I believe the use of contraceptives in the relationship of marriage should be left to personal and private choice, based upon each individual’s moral, ethical, and religious beliefs. As a matter of social policy, I think professional counsel about methods of birth control should be available to all, so that each individual’s choice can be meaningfully made. But we are not asked in this case to say whether we think this law is unwise, or even asinine. We are asked to hold that it violates the United States Constitution. And that I cannot do.

In the course of its opinion the Court refers to no less than six Amendments to the Constitution: the First, the Third, the Fourth, the Fifth, the Ninth, and the Fourteenth. But the Court does not say which of these Amendments, if any, it thinks is infringed by this Connecticut law.

...

As to the First, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Amendments, I can find nothing in any of them to invalidate this Connecticut law, even assuming that all those Amendments are fully applicable against the States. It has not even been argued that this is a law “respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” And surely, unless the solemn process of constitutional adjudication is to descend to the level of a play on words, there is not involved here any abridgment of “the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” No soldier has been quartered in any house. There has been no search, and no seizure. Nobody has been compelled to be a witness against himself.

The Court also quotes the Ninth Amendment, and my Brother Goldberg’s concurring opinion relies heavily upon it. But to say that the Ninth Amendment has anything to do with this case is to turn somersaults with history. The Ninth Amendment, like its companion the Tenth, which this Court held “states but a truism that all is retained which has not been surrendered,” *United States v. Darby*, 312 U.S. 100, 124, was framed by James Madison and adopted by the States simply to make clear that the adoption of the Bill of Rights did not alter the plan that the *Federal* Government was to be a government of express and limited powers, and that all rights and powers not delegated to it were retained by the people and the individual States. Until today no member of this Court has ever suggested that the Ninth Amendment meant anything else, and the idea that a federal court could ever use the Ninth Amendment to annul a law passed by the elected representatives of the people of the State of Connecticut would have caused James Madison no little wonder.

What provision of the Constitution, then, does make this state law invalid? The Court says it is the right of privacy “created by several fundamental constitutional guarantees.” With all deference, I can find no such general right of privacy in the Bill of Rights, in any other part of the Constitution, or in any case ever before decided by this Court.

At the oral argument in this case we were told that the Connecticut law does not “conform to current community standards.” But it is not the function of this Court to decide cases on the basis of community standards. We are here to decide cases “agreeably to the Constitution and laws of the United States.” It is the essence of judicial duty to subordinate our own personal views, our own ideas of what legislation is wise and what is not. If, as I should surely hope, the law before us does not reflect the standards of the people of Connecticut, the people of Connecticut can freely exercise their true Ninth and Tenth Amendment rights to persuade their

elected representatives to repeal it. That is the constitutional way to take this law off the books.

CASE QUESTIONS

1. Which opinion is the strict constructionist opinion here—Justice Douglas’s or that of Justices Stewart and Black?
2. What would have happened if the Supreme Court had allowed the Connecticut Supreme Court decision to stand and followed Justice Black’s reasoning? Is it likely that the citizens of Connecticut would have persuaded their elected representatives to repeal the law challenged here?

Wickard v. Filburn

Wickard v. Filburn

317 U.S. 111 (U.S. Supreme Court 1942)

Mr. Justice Jackson delivered the opinion of the Court.

Mr. Filburn for many years past has owned and operated a small farm in Montgomery County, Ohio, maintaining a herd of dairy cattle, selling milk, raising poultry, and selling poultry and eggs. It has been his practice to raise a small acreage of winter wheat, sown in the Fall and harvested in the following July; to sell a portion of the crop; to feed part to poultry and livestock on the farm, some of which is sold; to use some in making flour for home consumption; and to keep the rest for the following seeding.

His 1941 wheat acreage allotment was 11.1 acres and a normal yield of 20.1 bushels of wheat an acre. He sowed, however, 23 acres, and harvested from his 11.9 acres of excess acreage 239 bushels, which under the terms of the Act as amended on May 26, 1941, constituted farm marketing excess, subject to a penalty of 49 cents a bushel, or \$117.11 in all.

The general scheme of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 as related to wheat is to control the volume moving in interstate and foreign commerce in order to avoid surpluses and shortages and the consequent abnormally low or high wheat prices and obstructions to commerce. [T]he Secretary of Agriculture is directed to

ascertain and proclaim each year a national acreage allotment for the next crop of wheat, which is then apportioned to the states and their counties, and is eventually broken up into allotments for individual farms.

It is urged that under the Commerce Clause of the Constitution, Article I, § 8, clause 3, Congress does not possess the power it has in this instance sought to exercise. The question would merit little consideration since our decision in *United States v. Darby*, 312 U.S. 100, sustaining the federal power to regulate production of goods for commerce, except for the fact that this Act extends federal regulation to production not intended in any part for commerce but wholly for consumption on the farm.

Kassel v. Consolidated Freightways Corp.

Kassel v. Consolidated Freightways Corp.

450 U.S. 662 (U.S. Supreme Court 1981)

JUSTICE POWELL announced the judgment of the Court and delivered an opinion, in which JUSTICE WHITE, JUSTICE BLACKMUN, and JUSTICE STEVENS joined.

The question is whether an Iowa statute that prohibits the use of certain large trucks within the State unconstitutionally burdens interstate commerce.

I

Appellee Consolidated Freightways Corporation of Delaware (Consolidated) is one of the largest common carriers in the country: it offers service in 48 States under a certificate of public convenience and necessity issued by the Interstate Commerce Commission. Among other routes, Consolidated carries commodities through Iowa on Interstate 80, the principal east-west route linking New York, Chicago, and the west coast, and on Interstate 35, a major north-south route.

Consolidated mainly uses two kinds of trucks. One consists of a three-axle tractor pulling a 40-foot two-axle trailer. This unit, commonly called a single, or “semi,” is 55 feet in length overall. Such trucks have long been used on the Nation’s highways. Consolidated also uses a two-axle tractor pulling a single-axle trailer which, in turn, pulls a single-axle dolly and a second single-axle trailer. This combination, known as a double, or twin, is 65 feet long overall. Many trucking companies, including Consolidated, increasingly prefer to use doubles to ship certain kinds of commodities. Doubles have larger capacities, and the trailers can be detached and

routed separately if necessary. Consolidated would like to use 65-foot doubles on many of its trips through Iowa.

The State of Iowa, however, by statute, restricts the length of vehicles that may use its highways. Unlike all other States in the West and Midwest, Iowa generally prohibits the use of 65-foot doubles within its borders.

...

Because of Iowa's statutory scheme, Consolidated cannot use its 65-foot doubles to move commodities through the State. Instead, the company must do one of four things: (i) use 55-foot singles; (ii) use 60-foot doubles; (iii) detach the trailers of a 65-foot double and shuttle each through the State separately; or (iv) divert 65-foot doubles around Iowa. Dissatisfied with these options, Consolidated filed this suit in the District Court averring that Iowa's statutory scheme unconstitutionally burdens interstate commerce. Iowa defended the law as a reasonable safety measure enacted pursuant to its police power. The State asserted that 65-foot doubles are more dangerous than 55-foot singles and, in any event, that the law promotes safety and reduces road wear within the State by diverting much truck traffic to other states.

In a 14-day trial, both sides adduced evidence on safety and on the burden on interstate commerce imposed by Iowa's law. On the question of safety, the District Court found that the "evidence clearly establishes that the twin is as safe as the semi." 475 F.Supp. 544, 549 (SD Iowa 1979). For that reason, "there is no valid safety reason for barring twins from Iowa's highways because of their configuration....The evidence convincingly, if not overwhelmingly, establishes that the 65-foot twin is as safe as, if not safer than, the 60-foot twin and the 55-foot semi...."

"Twins and semis have different characteristics. Twins are more maneuverable, are less sensitive to wind, and create less splash and spray. However, they are more likely than semis to jackknife or upset. They can be backed only for a short distance. The negative characteristics are not such that they render the twin less safe than semis overall. Semis are more stable, but are more likely to 'rear-end' another vehicle."

In light of these findings, the District Court applied the standard we enunciated in *Raymond Motor Transportation, Inc. v. Rice*, 434 U.S. 429 (1978), and concluded that the state law impermissibly burdened interstate commerce: "[T]he balance here must be struck in favor of the federal interests. The *total effect* of the law as a safety measure in reducing accidents and casualties is so slight and problematical that it

does not outweigh the national interest in keeping interstate commerce free from interferences that seriously impede it.”

The Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit affirmed. 612 F.2d 1064 (1979). It accepted the District Court’s finding that 65-foot doubles were as safe as 55-foot singles. *Id.* at 1069. Thus, the only apparent safety benefit to Iowa was that resulting from forcing large trucks to detour around the State, thereby reducing overall truck traffic on Iowa’s highways. The Court of Appeals noted that this was not a constitutionally permissible interest. It also commented that the several statutory exemptions identified above, such as those applicable to border cities and the shipment of livestock, suggested that the law, in effect, benefited Iowa residents at the expense of interstate traffic. *Id.* at 1070-1071. The combination of these exemptions weakened the presumption of validity normally accorded a state safety regulation. For these reasons, the Court of Appeals agreed with the District Court that the Iowa statute unconstitutionally burdened interstate commerce.

Iowa appealed, and we noted probable jurisdiction. 446 U.S. 950 (1980). We now affirm.

II

It is unnecessary to review in detail the evolution of the principles of Commerce Clause adjudication. The Clause is both a “prolific ‘ of national power and an equally prolific source of conflict with legislation of the state[s].” *H. P. Hood & Sons, Inc. v. Du Mond*, 336 U.S. 525, 336 U.S. 534 (1949). The Clause permits Congress to legislate when it perceives that the national welfare is not furthered by the independent actions of the States. It is now well established, also, that the Clause itself is “a limitation upon state power even without congressional implementation.” *Hunt v. Washington Apple Advertising Comm’n*, 432 U.S. 333 at 350 (1977). The Clause requires that some aspects of trade generally must remain free from interference by the States. When a State ventures excessively into the regulation of these aspects of commerce, it “trespasses upon national interests,” *Great A&P Tea Co. v. Cottrell*, 424 U.S. 366, 424 U.S. 373 (1976), and the courts will hold the state regulation invalid under the Clause alone.

The Commerce Clause does not, of course, invalidate all state restrictions on commerce. It has long been recognized that, “in the absence of conflicting legislation by Congress, there is a residuum of power in the state to make laws governing matters of local concern which nevertheless in some measure affect interstate commerce or even, to some extent, regulate it.” *Southern Pacific Co. v. Arizona*, 325 U.S. 761 (1945).

The extent of permissible state regulation is not always easy to measure. It may be said with confidence, however, that a State's power to regulate commerce is never greater than in matters traditionally of local concern. *Washington Apple Advertising Comm'n, supra* at 432 U.S. 350. For example, regulations that touch upon safety—especially highway safety—are those that “the Court has been most reluctant to invalidate.” *Raymond, supra* at 434 U.S. 443 (and other cases cited). Indeed, “if safety justifications are not illusory, the Court will not second-guess legislative judgment about their importance in comparison with related burdens on interstate commerce.” *Raymond, supra* at 434 U.S. at 449. Those who would challenge such bona fide safety regulations must overcome a “strong presumption of validity.” *Bibb v. Navajo Freight Lines, Inc.*, 359 U.S. 520 at (1959).

But the incantation of a purpose to promote the public health or safety does not insulate a state law from Commerce Clause attack. Regulations designed for that salutary purpose nevertheless may further the purpose so marginally, and interfere with commerce so substantially, as to be invalid under the Commerce Clause. In the Court's recent unanimous decision in *Raymond* we declined to “accept the State's contention that the inquiry under the Commerce Clause is ended without a weighing of the asserted safety purpose against the degree of interference with interstate commerce.” This “weighing” by a court requires—and indeed the constitutionality of the state regulation depends on—“a sensitive consideration of the weight and nature of the state regulatory concern in light of the extent of the burden imposed on the course of interstate commerce.” *Id.* at 434 U.S. at 441; *accord, Pike v. Bruce Church, Inc.*, 397 U.S. 137 at 142 (1970); *Bibb, supra*, at 359 U.S. at 525-530.

III

Applying these general principles, we conclude that the Iowa truck length limitations unconstitutionally burden interstate commerce.

In *Raymond Motor Transportation, Inc. v. Rice*, the Court held that a Wisconsin statute that precluded the use of 65-foot doubles violated the Commerce Clause. This case is *Raymond* revisited. Here, as in *Raymond*, the State failed to present any persuasive evidence that 65-foot doubles are less safe than 55-foot singles. Moreover, Iowa's law is now out of step with the laws of all other Midwestern and Western States. Iowa thus substantially burdens the interstate flow of goods by truck. In the absence of congressional action to set uniform standards, some burdens associated with state safety regulations must be tolerated. But where, as here, the State's safety interest has been found to be illusory, and its regulations impair significantly the federal interest in efficient and safe interstate transportation, the state law cannot be harmonized with the Commerce Clause.

A

Iowa made a more serious effort to support the safety rationale of its law than did Wisconsin in *Raymond*, but its effort was no more persuasive. As noted above, the District Court found that the “evidence clearly establishes that the twin is as safe as the semi.” The record supports this finding. The trial focused on a comparison of the performance of the two kinds of trucks in various safety categories. The evidence showed, and the District Court found, that the 65-foot double was at least the equal of the 55-foot single in the ability to brake, turn, and maneuver. The double, because of its axle placement, produces less splash and spray in wet weather. And, because of its articulation in the middle, the double is less susceptible to dangerous “off-tracking,” and to wind.

None of these findings is seriously disputed by Iowa. Indeed, the State points to only three ways in which the 55-foot single is even arguably superior: singles take less time to be passed and to clear intersections; they may back up for longer distances; and they are somewhat less likely to jackknife.

The first two of these characteristics are of limited relevance on modern interstate highways. As the District Court found, the negligible difference in the time required to pass, and to cross intersections, is insignificant on 4-lane divided highways, because passing does not require crossing into oncoming traffic lanes, *Raymond*, 434 U.S. at 444, and interstates have few, if any, intersections. The concern over backing capability also is insignificant, because it seldom is necessary to back up on an interstate. In any event, no evidence suggested any difference in backing capability between the 60-foot doubles that Iowa permits and the 65-foot doubles that it bans. Similarly, although doubles tend to jackknife somewhat more than singles, 65-foot doubles actually are less likely to jackknife than 60-foot doubles.

Statistical studies supported the view that 65-foot doubles are at least as safe overall as 55-foot singles and 60-foot doubles. One such study, which the District Court credited, reviewed Consolidated’s comparative accident experience in 1978 with its own singles and doubles. Each kind of truck was driven 56 million miles on identical routes. The singles were involved in 100 accidents resulting in 27 injuries and one fatality. The 65-foot doubles were involved in 106 accidents resulting in 17 injuries and one fatality. Iowa’s expert statistician admitted that this study provided “moderately strong evidence” that singles have a higher injury rate than doubles. Another study, prepared by the Iowa Department of Transportation at the request of the state legislature, concluded that “[s]ixty-five foot twin trailer combinations have *not* been shown by experiences in other states to be less safe than 60-foot twin trailer combinations *or* conventional tractor-semitrailers.”

In sum, although Iowa introduced more evidence on the question of safety than did Wisconsin in *Raymond*, the record as a whole was not more favorable to the State.

B

Consolidated, meanwhile, demonstrated that Iowa's law substantially burdens interstate commerce. Trucking companies that wish to continue to use 65-foot doubles must route them around Iowa or detach the trailers of the doubles and ship them through separately. Alternatively, trucking companies must use the smaller 55-foot singles or 65-foot doubles permitted under Iowa law. Each of these options engenders inefficiency and added expense. The record shows that Iowa's law added about \$12.6 million each year to the costs of trucking companies.

Consolidated alone incurred about \$2 million per year in increased costs.

In addition to increasing the costs of the trucking companies (and, indirectly, of the service to consumers), Iowa's law may aggravate, rather than, ameliorate, the problem of highway accidents. Fifty-five-foot singles carry less freight than 65-foot doubles. Either more small trucks must be used to carry the same quantity of goods through Iowa or the same number of larger trucks must drive longer distances to bypass Iowa. In either case, as the District Court noted, the restriction requires more highway miles to be driven to transport the same quantity of goods. Other things being equal, accidents are proportional to distance traveled. Thus, if 65-foot doubles are as safe as 55-foot singles, Iowa's law tends to increase the number of accidents and to shift the incidence of them from Iowa to other States.

[IV. Omitted]

V

In sum, the statutory exemptions, their history, and the arguments Iowa has advanced in support of its law in this litigation all suggest that the deference traditionally accorded a State's safety judgment is not warranted. *See Raymond, supra* at 434 U.S. at 444-447. The controlling factors thus are the findings of the District Court, accepted by the Court of Appeals, with respect to the relative safety of the types of trucks at issue, and the substantiality of the burden on interstate commerce.

Because Iowa has imposed this burden without any significant countervailing safety interest, its statute violates the Commerce Clause. The judgment of the Court of Appeals is affirmed.

It is so ordered.

CASE QUESTIONS

1. Under the Constitution, what gives Iowa the right to make rules regarding the size or configuration of trucks upon highways within the state?
2. Did Iowa try to exempt trucking lines based in Iowa, or was the statutory rule nondiscriminatory as to the origin of trucks that traveled on Iowa highways?
3. Are there any federal size or weight standards noted in the case? Is there any kind of truck size or weight that could be limited by Iowa law, or must Iowa simply accept federal standards or, if none, impose no standards at all?

Hunt v. Washington Apple Advertising Commission

Hunt v. Washington Apple Advertising Commission

432 U.S. 33 (U.S. Supreme Court 1977)

MR. CHIEF JUSTICE BURGER delivered the opinion of the Court.

In 1973, North Carolina enacted a statute which required, inter alia, all closed containers of apples sold, offered for sale, or shipped into the State to bear “no grade other than the applicable U.S. grade or standard.”...Washington State is the Nation’s largest producer of apples, its crops accounting for approximately 30% of all apples grown domestically and nearly half of all apples shipped in closed containers in interstate commerce. [Because] of the importance of the apple industry to the State, its legislature has undertaken to protect and enhance the reputation of Washington apples by establishing a stringent, mandatory inspection program [that] requires all apples shipped in interstate commerce to be tested under strict quality standards and graded accordingly. In all cases, the Washington State grades [are] the equivalent of, or superior to, the comparable grades and standards adopted by the [U.S. Dept. of] Agriculture (USDA).

[In] 1972, the North Carolina Board of Agriculture adopted an administrative regulation, unique in the 50 States, which in effect required all closed containers of apples shipped into or sold in the State to display either the applicable USDA grade or a notice indicating no classification. State grades were expressly prohibited. In

addition to its obvious consequence—prohibiting the display of Washington State apple grades on containers of apples shipped into North Carolina—the regulation presented the Washington apple industry with a marketing problem of potentially nationwide significance. Washington apple growers annually ship in commerce approximately 40 million closed containers of apples, nearly 500,000 of which eventually find their way into North Carolina, stamped with the applicable Washington State variety and grade. [Compliance] with North Carolina’s unique regulation would have required Washington growers to obliterate the printed labels on containers shipped to North Carolina, thus giving their product a damaged appearance. Alternatively, they could have changed their marketing practices to accommodate the needs of the North Carolina market, i.e., repack apples to be shipped to North Carolina in containers bearing only the USDA grade, and/or store the estimated portion of the harvest destined for that market in such special containers. As a last resort, they could discontinue the use of the preprinted containers entirely. None of these costly and less efficient options was very attractive to the industry. Moreover, in the event a number of other States followed North Carolina’s lead, the resultant inability to display the Washington grades could force the Washington growers to abandon the State’s expensive inspection and grading system which their customers had come to know and rely on over the 60-odd years of its existence....

Unsuccessful in its attempts to secure administrative relief [with North Carolina], the Commission instituted this action challenging the constitutionality of the statute. [The] District Court found that the North Carolina statute, while neutral on its face, actually discriminated against Washington State growers and dealers in favor of their local counterparts [and] concluded that this discrimination [was] not justified by the asserted local interest—the elimination of deception and confusion from the marketplace—arguably furthered by the [statute].

...

[North Carolina] maintains that [the] burdens on the interstate sale of Washington apples were far outweighed by the local benefits flowing from what they contend was a valid exercise of North Carolina’s [police powers]. Prior to the statute’s enactment,...apples from 13 different States were shipped into North Carolina for sale. Seven of those States, including [Washington], had their own grading systems which, while differing in their standards, used similar descriptive labels (e.g., fancy, extra fancy, etc.). This multiplicity of inconsistent state grades [posed] dangers of deception and confusion not only in the North Carolina market, but in the Nation as a whole. The North Carolina statute, appellants claim, was enacted to eliminate this source of deception and confusion. [Moreover], it is contended that North Carolina sought to accomplish this goal of uniformity in an evenhanded manner as

evidenced by the fact that its statute applies to all apples sold in closed containers in the State without regard to their point of origin.

[As] the appellants properly point out, not every exercise of state authority imposing some burden on the free flow of commerce is invalid, [especially] when the State acts to protect its citizenry in matters pertaining to the sale of foodstuffs. By the same token, however, a finding that state legislation furthers matters of legitimate local concern, even in the health and consumer protection areas, does not end the inquiry. Rather, when such state legislation comes into conflict with the Commerce Clause's overriding requirement of a national "common market," we are confronted with the task of effecting an accommodation of the competing national and local interests. We turn to that task.

As the District Court correctly found, the challenged statute has the practical effect of not only burdening interstate sales of Washington apples, but also discriminating against them. This discrimination takes various forms. The first, and most obvious, is the statute's consequence of raising *the costs* of doing business in the North Carolina market for Washington apple growers and dealers, while leaving those of their North Carolina counterparts unaffected. [This] disparate effect results from the fact that North Carolina apple producers, unlike their Washington competitors, were not forced to alter their marketing practices in order to comply with the statute. They were still free to market their wares under the USDA grade or none at all as they had done prior to the statute's enactment. Obviously, the increased costs imposed by the statute would tend to shield the local apple industry from the competition of Washington apple growers and dealers who are already at a competitive disadvantage because of their great distance from the North Carolina market.

Second, the statute has the effect of *stripping away* from the Washington apple industry the competitive and economic advantages it has earned for itself through its expensive inspection and grading system. The record demonstrates that the Washington apple-grading system has gained nationwide acceptance in the apple trade. [The record] contains numerous affidavits [stating a] preference [for] apples graded under the Washington, as opposed to the USDA, system because of the former's greater consistency, its emphasis on color, and its supporting mandatory inspections. Once again, the statute had no similar impact on the North Carolina apple industry and thus operated to its benefit.

Third, by *prohibiting* Washington growers and dealers from marketing apples under their State's grades, the statute has a *leveling effect* which insidiously operates to the advantage of local apple producers. [With] free market forces at work, Washington sellers would normally enjoy a distinct market advantage vis-à-vis local producers

in those categories where the Washington grade is superior. However, because of the statute's operation, Washington apples which would otherwise qualify for and be sold under the superior Washington grades will now have to be marketed under their inferior USDA counterparts. Such "downgrading" offers the North Carolina apple industry the very sort of protection against competing out-of-state products that the Commerce Clause was designed to prohibit. At worst, it will have the effect of an embargo against those Washington apples in the superior grades as Washington dealers withhold them from the North Carolina market. At best, it will deprive Washington sellers of the market premium that such apples would otherwise command.

Despite the statute's facial neutrality, the Commission suggests that its discriminatory impact on interstate commerce was not an unintended by-product, and there are some indications in the record to that effect. The most glaring is the response of the North Carolina Agriculture Commissioner to the Commission's request for an exemption following the statute's passage in which he indicated that before he could support such an exemption, he would "want to have the sentiment from our apple producers *since they were mainly responsible for this legislation being passed.*" [Moreover], we find it somewhat suspect that North Carolina singled out only closed containers of apples, the very means by which apples are transported in commerce, to effectuate the statute's ostensible consumer protection purpose when apples are not generally sold at retail in their shipping containers. However, we need not ascribe an economic protection motive to the North Carolina Legislature to resolve this case; we conclude that the challenged statute cannot stand insofar as it prohibits the display of Washington State grades even if enacted for the declared purpose of protecting consumers from deception and fraud in the marketplace.

...

Finally, we note that any potential for confusion and deception created by the Washington grades was not of the type that led to the statute's enactment. Since Washington grades are in all cases equal or superior to their USDA counterparts, they could only "deceive" or "confuse" a consumer to his benefit, hardly a harmful result.

In addition, it appears that nondiscriminatory alternatives to the outright ban of Washington State grades are readily available. For example, North Carolina could effectuate its goal by permitting out-of-state growers to utilize state grades only if they also marked their shipments with the applicable USDA label. In that case, the USDA grade would serve as a benchmark against which the consumer could evaluate the quality of the various state grades....

[The court affirmed the lower court's holding that the North Carolina statute was unconstitutional.]

CASE QUESTIONS

1. Was the North Carolina law discriminatory on its face? Was it, possibly, an undue burden on interstate commerce? Why wouldn't it be?
2. What evidence was there of discriminatory intent behind the North Carolina law? Did that evidence even matter? Why or why not?

Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission

Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission

588 U.S. ____; 130 S.Ct. 876 (U.S. Supreme Court 2010)

Justice Kennedy delivered the opinion of the Court.

Federal law prohibits corporations and unions from using their general treasury funds to make independent expenditures for speech defined as an “electioneering communication” or for speech expressly advocating the election or defeat of a candidate. 2 U.S.C. §441b. Limits on electioneering communications were upheld in *McConnell v. Federal Election Comm’n*, 540 U.S. 93, 203–209 (2003). The holding of *McConnell* rested to a large extent on an earlier case, *Austin v. Michigan Chamber of Commerce*, 494 U.S. 652 (1990). *Austin* had held that political speech may be banned based on the speaker’s corporate identity.

In this case we are asked to reconsider *Austin* and, in effect, *McConnell*. It has been noted that “*Austin* was a significant departure from ancient First Amendment principles,” *Federal Election Comm’n v. Wisconsin Right to Life, Inc.*, 551 U.S. 449, 490 (2007) (*WRTL*) (Scalia, J., concurring in part and concurring in judgment). We agree with that conclusion and hold that *stare decisis* does not compel the continued acceptance of *Austin*. The Government may regulate corporate political speech through disclaimer and disclosure requirements, but it may not suppress that speech altogether. We turn to the case now before us.

I
A

Citizens United is a nonprofit corporation. It has an annual budget of about \$12 million. Most of its funds are from donations by individuals; but, in addition, it accepts a small portion of its funds from for-profit corporations.

In January 2008, Citizens United released a film entitled *Hillary: The Movie*. We refer to the film as *Hillary*. It is a 90-minute documentary about then-Senator Hillary Clinton, who was a candidate in the Democratic Party's 2008 Presidential primary elections. *Hillary* mentions Senator Clinton by name and depicts interviews with political commentators and other persons, most of them quite critical of Senator Clinton....

In December 2007, a cable company offered, for a payment of \$1.2 million, to make *Hillary* available on a video-on-demand channel called "Elections '08."...Citizens United was prepared to pay for the video-on-demand; and to promote the film, it produced two 10-second ads and one 30-second ad for *Hillary*. Each ad includes a short (and, in our view, pejorative) statement about Senator Clinton, followed by the name of the movie and the movie's Website address. Citizens United desired to promote the video-on-demand offering by running advertisements on broadcast and cable television.

B

Before the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (BCRA), federal law prohibited—and still does prohibit—corporations and unions from using general treasury funds to make direct contributions to candidates or independent expenditures that expressly advocate the election or defeat of a candidate, through any form of media, in connection with certain qualified federal elections....BCRA §203 amended §441b to prohibit any "electioneering communication" as well. An electioneering communication is defined as "any broadcast, cable, or satellite communication" that "refers to a clearly identified candidate for Federal office" and is made within 30 days of a primary or 60 days of a general election. §434(f)(3)(A). The Federal Election Commission's (FEC) regulations further define an electioneering communication as a communication that is "publicly distributed." 11 CFR §100.29(a)(2) (2009). "In the case of a candidate for nomination for President...publicly distributed means" that the communication "[c]an be received by 50,000 or more persons in a State where a primary election...is being held within 30 days." 11 CFR §100.29(b)(3)(ii). Corporations and unions are barred from using their general treasury funds for express advocacy or electioneering communications. They may establish, however, a "separate segregated fund" (known as a political action committee, or PAC) for these purposes. 2 U.S.C. §441b(b)(2). The moneys

received by the segregated fund are limited to donations from stockholders and employees of the corporation or, in the case of unions, members of the union. *Ibid.*

C

Citizens United wanted to make *Hillary* available through video-on-demand within 30 days of the 2008 primary elections. It feared, however, that both the film and the ads would be covered by §441b's ban on corporate-funded independent expenditures, thus subjecting the corporation to civil and criminal penalties under §437g. In December 2007, Citizens United sought declaratory and injunctive relief against the FEC. It argued that (1) §441b is unconstitutional as applied to *Hillary*; and (2) BCRA's disclaimer and disclosure requirements, BCRA §§201 and 311, are unconstitutional as applied to *Hillary* and to the three ads for the movie.

The District Court denied Citizens United's motion for a preliminary injunction, and then granted the FEC's motion for summary judgment.

...

The court held that §441b was facially constitutional under *McConnell*, and that §441b was constitutional as applied to *Hillary* because it was "susceptible of no other interpretation than to inform the electorate that Senator Clinton is unfit for office, that the United States would be a dangerous place in a President Hillary Clinton world, and that viewers should vote against her." 530 F. Supp. 2d, at 279. The court also rejected Citizens United's challenge to BCRA's disclaimer and disclosure requirements. It noted that "the Supreme Court has written approvingly of disclosure provisions triggered by political speech even though the speech itself was constitutionally protected under the First Amendment." *Id.* at 281.

II

[Omitted: the court considers whether it is possible to reject the BCRA without declaring certain provisions unconstitutional. The court concludes it cannot find a basis to reject the BCRA that does not involve constitutional issues.]

III

The First Amendment provides that "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech." Laws enacted to control or suppress speech may operate at different points in the speech process....The law before us is an outright ban, backed by criminal sanctions. Section 441b makes it a felony for all corporations—including nonprofit advocacy corporations—either to expressly advocate the election or

defeat of candidates or to broadcast electioneering communications within 30 days of a primary election and 60 days of a general election. Thus, the following acts would all be felonies under §441b: The Sierra Club runs an ad, within the crucial phase of 60 days before the general election, that exhorts the public to disapprove of a Congressman who favors logging in national forests; the National Rifle Association publishes a book urging the public to vote for the challenger because the incumbent U.S. Senator supports a handgun ban; and the American Civil Liberties Union creates a Web site telling the public to vote for a Presidential candidate in light of that candidate's defense of free speech. These prohibitions are classic examples of censorship.

Section 441b is a ban on corporate speech notwithstanding the fact that a PAC created by a corporation can still speak. PACs are burdensome alternatives; they are expensive to administer and subject to extensive regulations. For example, every PAC must appoint a treasurer, forward donations to the treasurer promptly, keep detailed records of the identities of the persons making donations, preserve receipts for three years, and file an organization statement and report changes to this information within 10 days.

And that is just the beginning. PACs must file detailed monthly reports with the FEC, which are due at different times depending on the type of election that is about to occur....

PACs have to comply with these regulations just to speak. This might explain why fewer than 2,000 of the millions of corporations in this country have PACs. PACs, furthermore, must exist before they can speak. Given the onerous restrictions, a corporation may not be able to establish a PAC in time to make its views known regarding candidates and issues in a current campaign.

Section 441b's prohibition on corporate independent expenditures is thus a ban on speech. As a "restriction on the amount of money a person or group can spend on political communication during a campaign," that statute "necessarily reduces the quantity of expression by restricting the number of issues discussed, the depth of their exploration, and the size of the audience reached." *Buckley v. Valeo*, 424 U.S. 1 at 19 (1976)....

Speech is an essential mechanism of democracy, for it is the means to hold officials accountable to the people. See *Buckley, supra*, at 14–15 ("In a republic where the people are sovereign, the ability of the citizenry to make informed choices among candidates for office is essential.") The right of citizens to inquire, to hear, to speak, and to use information to reach consensus is a precondition to enlightened self-government and a necessary means to protect it. The First Amendment "has its

fullest and most urgent application' to speech uttered during a campaign for political office.”

For these reasons, political speech must prevail against laws that would suppress it, whether by design or inadvertence. Laws that burden political speech are “subject to strict scrutiny,” which requires the Government to prove that the restriction “furthers a compelling interest and is narrowly tailored to achieve that interest.”

...

The Court has recognized that First Amendment protection extends to corporations. This protection has been extended by explicit holdings to the context of political speech. Under the rationale of these precedents, political speech does not lose First Amendment protection “simply because its source is a corporation.” *Bellotti, supra*, at 784. The Court has thus rejected the argument that political speech of corporations or other associations should be treated differently under the First Amendment simply because such associations are not “natural persons.”

The purpose and effect of this law is to prevent corporations, including small and nonprofit corporations, from presenting both facts and opinions to the public. This makes *Austin*'s antidistortion rationale all the more an aberration. “[T]he First Amendment protects the right of corporations to petition legislative and administrative bodies.” *Bellotti*, 435 U.S., at 792, n. 31....

Even if §441b's expenditure ban were constitutional, wealthy corporations could still lobby elected officials, although smaller corporations may not have the resources to do so. And wealthy individuals and unincorporated associations can spend unlimited amounts on independent expenditures. See, e.g., *WRTL*, 551 U.S., at 503–504 (opinion of Scalia, J.) (“In the 2004 election cycle, a mere 24 individuals contributed an astounding total of \$142 million to [26 U.S.C. §527 organizations]”). Yet certain disfavored associations of citizens—those that have taken on the corporate form—are penalized for engaging in the same political speech.

When Government seeks to use its full power, including the criminal law, to command where a person may get his or her information or what distrusted source he or she may not hear, it uses censorship to control thought. This is unlawful. The First Amendment confirms the freedom to think for ourselves.

What we have said also shows the invalidity of other arguments made by the Government. For the most part relinquishing the anti-distortion rationale, the

Government falls back on the argument that corporate political speech can be banned in order to prevent corruption or its appearance....

When Congress finds that a problem exists, we must give that finding due deference; but Congress may not choose an unconstitutional remedy. If elected officials succumb to improper influences from independent expenditures; if they surrender their best judgment; and if they put expediency before principle, then surely there is cause for concern. We must give weight to attempts by Congress to seek to dispel either the appearance or the reality of these influences. The remedies enacted by law, however, must comply with the First Amendment; and, it is our law and our tradition that more speech, not less, is the governing rule. An outright ban on corporate political speech during the critical preelection period is not a permissible remedy. Here Congress has created categorical bans on speech that are asymmetrical to preventing *quid pro quo* corruption.

Our precedent is to be respected unless the most convincing of reasons demonstrates that adherence to it puts us on a course that is sure error. “Beyond workability, the relevant factors in deciding whether to adhere to the principle of *stare decisis* include the antiquity of the precedent, the reliance interests at stake, and of course whether the decision was well reasoned.” [citing prior cases]

These considerations counsel in favor of rejecting *Austin*, which itself contravened this Court’s earlier precedents in *Buckley* and *Bellotti*. “This Court has not hesitated to overrule decisions offensive to the First Amendment.” *WRTL*, 551 U.S., at 500 (opinion of Scalia, J.). “[*S*]tare decisis is a principle of policy and not a mechanical formula of adherence to the latest decision.” *Helvering v. Hallock*, 309 U.S. 106 at 119 (1940).

Austin is undermined by experience since its announcement. Political speech is so ingrained in our culture that speakers find ways to circumvent campaign finance laws. See, e.g., *McConnell*, 540 U.S., at 176–177 (“Given BCRA’s tighter restrictions on the raising and spending of soft money, the incentives...to exploit [26 U.S.C. §527] organizations will only increase”). Our Nation’s speech dynamic is changing, and informative voices should not have to circumvent onerous restrictions to exercise their First Amendment rights. Speakers have become adept at presenting citizens with sound bites, talking points, and scripted messages that dominate the 24-hour news cycle. Corporations, like individuals, do not have monolithic views. On certain topics corporations may possess valuable expertise, leaving them the best equipped to point out errors or fallacies in speech of all sorts, including the speech of candidates and elected officials.

Rapid changes in technology—and the creative dynamic inherent in the concept of free expression—counsel against upholding a law that restricts political speech in certain media or by certain speakers. Today, 30-second television ads may be the most effective way to convey a political message. Soon, however, it may be that Internet sources, such as blogs and social networking Web sites, will provide citizens with significant information about political candidates and issues. Yet, §441b would seem to ban a blog post expressly advocating the election or defeat of a candidate if that blog were created with corporate funds. The First Amendment does not permit Congress to make these categorical distinctions based on the corporate identity of the speaker and the content of the political speech.

Due consideration leads to this conclusion: *Austin* should be and now is overruled. We return to the principle established in *Buckley* and *Bellotti* that the Government may not suppress political speech on the basis of the speaker's corporate identity. No sufficient governmental interest justifies limits on the political speech of nonprofit or for-profit corporations.

[IV. Omitted]

V

When word concerning the plot of the movie *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* reached the circles of Government, some officials sought, by persuasion, to discourage its distribution. See Smoodin, "Compulsory" Viewing for Every Citizen: *Mr. Smith* and the Rhetoric of Reception, 35 *Cinema Journal* 3, 19, and n. 52 (Winter 1996) (citing *Mr. Smith Riles Washington*, *Time*, Oct. 30, 1939, p. 49); Nugent, *Capra's Capitol Offense*, *N. Y. Times*, Oct. 29, 1939, p. X5. Under *Austin*, though, officials could have done more than discourage its distribution—they could have banned the film. After all, it, like *Hillary*, was speech funded by a corporation that was critical of Members of Congress. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* may be fiction and caricature; but fiction and caricature can be a powerful force.

Modern day movies, television comedies, or skits on YouTube.com might portray public officials or public policies in unflattering ways. Yet if a covered transmission during the blackout period creates the background for candidate endorsement or opposition, a felony occurs solely because a corporation, other than an exempt media corporation, has made the "purchase, payment, distribution, loan, advance, deposit, or gift of money or anything of value" in order to engage in political speech. 2 U.S.C. §431(9)(A)(i). Speech would be suppressed in the realm where its necessity is most evident: in the public dialogue preceding a real election. Governments are often hostile to speech, but under our law and our tradition it seems stranger than fiction for our Government to make this political speech a crime. Yet this is the statute's purpose and design.

Some members of the public might consider *Hillary* to be insightful and instructive; some might find it to be neither high art nor a fair discussion on how to set the Nation's course; still others simply might suspend judgment on these points but decide to think more about issues and candidates. Those choices and assessments, however, are not for the Government to make. "The First Amendment underwrites the freedom to experiment and to create in the realm of thought and speech. Citizens must be free to use new forms, and new forums, for the expression of ideas. The civic discourse belongs to the people, and the Government may not prescribe the means used to conduct it." *McConnell*, *supra*, at 341 (opinion of Kennedy, J.).

The judgment of the District Court is reversed with respect to the constitutionality of 2 U.S.C. §441b's restrictions on corporate independent expenditures. The case is remanded for further proceedings consistent with this opinion.

It is so ordered.

CASE QUESTIONS

1. What does the case say about disclosure? Corporations have a right of free speech under the First Amendment and may exercise that right through unrestricted contributions of money to political parties and candidates. Can the government condition that right by requiring that the parties and candidates disclose to the public the amount and origin of the contribution? What would justify such a disclosure requirement?
2. Are a corporation's contributions to political parties and candidates tax deductible as a business expense? Should they be?
3. How is the donation of money equivalent to speech? Is this a strict construction of the Constitution to hold that it is?
4. Based on the Court's description of the *Austin* case, what purpose do you think the *Austin* court was trying to achieve by limiting corporate campaign contributions? Was that purpose consistent (or inconsistent) with anything in the Constitution, or is the Constitution essentially silent on this issue?

4.7 Summary and Exercises

Summary

The US Constitution sets the framework for all other laws of the United States, at both the federal and the state level. It creates a shared balance of power between states and the federal government (federalism) and shared power among the branches of government (separation of powers), establishes individual rights against governmental action (Bill of Rights), and provides for federal oversight of matters affecting interstate commerce and commerce with foreign nations. Knowing the contours of the US legal system is not possible without understanding the role of the US Constitution.

The Constitution is difficult to amend. Thus when the Supreme Court uses its power of judicial review to determine that a law is unconstitutional, it actually shapes what the Constitution means. New meanings that emerge must do so by the process of amendment or by the passage of time and new appointments to the court. Because justices serve for life, the court changes its philosophical outlook slowly.

The Bill of Rights is an especially important piece of the Constitutional framework. It provides legal causes of action for infringements of individual rights by government, state or federal. Through the due process clause of the Fifth Amendment and the Fourteenth Amendment, both procedural and (to some extent) substantive due process rights are given to individuals.

EXERCISES

1. For many years, the Supreme Court believed that “commercial speech” was entitled to less protection than other forms of speech. One defining element of commercial speech is that its dominant theme is to propose a commercial transaction. This kind of speech is protected by the First Amendment, but the government is permitted to regulate it more closely than other forms of speech. However, the government must make reasonable distinctions, must narrowly tailor the rules restricting commercial speech, and must show that government has a legitimate goal that the law furthers.

Edward Salib owned a Winchell’s Donut House in Mesa, Arizona. To attract customers, he displayed large signs in store windows. The city ordered him to remove the signs because they violated the city’s sign code, which prohibited covering more than 30 percent of a store’s windows with signs. Salib sued, claiming that the sign code violated his First Amendment rights. What was the result, and why?

2. Jennifer is a freshman at her local public high school. Her sister, Jackie, attends a nearby private high school. Neither school allows them to join its respective wrestling team; only boys can wrestle at either school. Do either of them have a winning case based on the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment?
3. The employees of the US Treasury Department that work the border crossing between the United States and Mexico learned that they will be subject to routine drug testing. The customs bureau, which is a division of the treasury department, announces this policy along with its reasoning: since customs agents must routinely search for drugs coming into the United States, it makes sense that border guards must themselves be completely drug-free. Many border guards do not use drugs, have no intention of using drugs, and object to the invasion of their privacy. What is the constitutional basis for their objection?
4. Happy Time Chevrolet employs Jim Bydalek as a salesman. Bydalek takes part in a Gay Pride March in Los Angeles, is interviewed by a local news camera crew, and reports that he is gay and proud of it. His employer is not, and he is fired. Does he have any constitutional causes of action against his employer?
5. You begin work at the Happy-Go-Lucky Corporation on Halloween. On your second day at work, you wear a political button on your coat,

supporting your choice for US senator in the upcoming election. Your boss, who is of a different political persuasion, looks at the button and says, “Take that stupid button off or you’re fired.” Has your boss violated your constitutional rights?

6. David Lucas paid \$975,000 for two residential parcels on the Isle of Palms near Charleston, South Carolina. His intention was to build houses on them. Two years later, the South Carolina legislature passed a statute that prohibited building beachfront properties. The purpose was to leave the dunes system in place to mitigate the effects of hurricanes and strong storms. The South Carolina Coastal Commission created the rules and regulations with substantial input from the community and from experts and with protection of the dune system primarily in mind. People had been building on the shoreline for years, with harmful results to localities and the state treasury. When Lucas applied for permits to build two houses near the shoreline, his permits were rejected. He sued, arguing that the South Carolina legislation had effectively “taken” his property. At trial, South Carolina conceded that because of the legislation, Lucas’s property was effectively worth zero. Has there been a taking under the Fifth Amendment (as incorporated through the Fourteenth Amendment), and if so, what should the state owe to Lucas? Suppose that Lucas could have made an additional \$1 million by building a house on each of his parcels. Is he entitled to recover his original purchase price or his potential profits?

SELF-TEST QUESTIONS

1. Harvey filed a suit against the state of Colorado, claiming that a Colorado state law violates the commerce clause. The court will agree if the statute
 - a. places an undue burden on interstate commerce
 - b. promotes the public health, safety, morals, or general welfare of Colorado
 - c. regulates economic activities within the state's borders
 - d. a and b
 - e. b and c

2. The state legislature in Maine enacts a law that directly conflicts with a federal law. Mapco Industries, located in Portland, Maine, cannot comply with both the state and the federal law.
 - a. Because of federalism, the state law will have priority, as long as Maine is using its police powers.
 - b. Because there's a conflict, both laws are invalid; the state and the federal government will have to work out a compromise of some sort.
 - c. The federal law preempts the state law.
 - d. Both laws govern concurrently.

3. Hannah, who lives in Ada, is the owner of Superior Enterprises, Inc. She believes that certain actions in the state of Ohio infringe on her federal constitutional rights, especially those found in the Bill of Rights. Most of these rights apply to the states under
 - a. the supremacy clause
 - b. the protection clause
 - c. the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment
 - d. the Tenth Amendment

4. Minnesota enacts a statute that bans all advertising that is in "bad taste," "vulgar," or "indecent." In Michigan, Aaron Calloway and his brother, Clarence "Cab" Calloway, create unique beer that they decide to call Old Fart Ale. In their marketing, the brothers have a label in which an older man in a dirty T-shirt is sitting in easy chair, looking disheveled and

having a three-day growth of stubble on his chin. It appears that the man is in the process of belching. He is also holding a can of Old Fart Ale. The Minnesota liquor commission orders all Minnesota restaurants, bars, and grocery stores to remove Old Fart Ale from their shelves. The state statute and the commission's order are likely to be held by a court to be

- a. a violation of the Tenth Amendment
 - b. a violation of the First Amendment
 - c. a violation of the Calloways' right to equal protection of the laws
 - d. a violation of the commerce clause, since only the federal laws can prevent an article of commerce from entering into Minnesota's market
5. Raunch Unlimited, a Virginia partnership, sells smut whenever and wherever it can. Some of its material is "obscene" (meeting the Supreme Court's definition under *Miller v. California*) and includes child pornography. North Carolina has a statute that criminalizes obscenity. What are possible results if a store in Raleigh, North Carolina, carries Raunch merchandise?
- a. The partners could be arrested in North Carolina and may well be convicted.
 - b. The materials in Raleigh may be the basis for a criminal conviction.
 - c. The materials are protected under the First Amendment's right of free speech.
 - d. The materials are protected under state law.
 - e. a and b

SELF-TEST ANSWERS

1. a
2. c
3. c
4. b
5. e