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For Immediate Release

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Briefs filed in watershed campaign spending limits case

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Supreme Court hearing scheduled this month

Boston, MA – A broad range of public officials and organizations yesterday filed briefs in the U.S. Supreme Court in support of Vermont's comprehensive campaign finance law. Oral arguments are scheduled for February 28, 2006. The case is a highly anticipated opportunity for the Court to consider anew whether or not carefully drawn campaign spending limit laws can be constitutional. The Court had ruled in *Buckley v. Valeo* in 1976 that recently passed limits on Congressional campaign spending were unconstitutional. This is the first time the Court will have considered the question since then.

NVRI Executive Director Stuart Comstock-Gay said, "In this case, the Supreme Court faces an historic opportunity. For nearly three decades since the *Buckley* ruling, the nation has witnessed the threat posed to our democracy by unlimited campaign spending. The Jack Abramoff scandal shows once again that the never-ending need for more and more campaign money creates a constant temptation to go down a wrong path. The time has come to look at new facts and circumstances presented by Vermont, and revisit the prohibition on spending limits."

NVRI represents a coalition of Vermont voters, candidates and public interest groups helping to defend the law. NVRI Managing Attorney Brenda Wright will argue the case later this month, along with Vermont Attorney General William Sorrell.

The Supreme Court is reviewing the case because the U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals in the summer of 2004 ruled that spending limits may be upheld under the First Amendment, the first time a federal court had issued such a ruling since the Supreme Court's 1976 ruling.

Paul Burns, Executive Director of the Vermont Public Interest Research Group (VPIRG), which leads the Vermont coalition in support of the law, added, “This case is poised to shake up a campaign spending system that is, frankly, broken. The current laws almost guarantee that money corrupts the process by forcing candidates and elected officials to put aside the interests of their constituents as they chase dollars endlessly.”

The amicus briefs filed today come from a wide range of voices, including a bi-partisan group of 13 U.S. Senators and Representatives, former U.S. Senators Bill Bradley (D-NJ) and Alan Simpson (R-WY), 17 state Attorneys General, several state Secretaries of State, 13 current and former elected state judges and justices, several candidates who have run as challengers in Congressional elections, nearly two dozen democracy reform and civil rights organizations, and many others.

A recent poll commissioned by NVRI shows that the public overwhelmingly supports campaign spending limits as a means to press candidates to spend more time with voters, rather than merely raising money. In the poll, conducted in late November 2005, 87% of voters supported such limits. That survey can be found at <http://www.demos.org/page422.cfm>.

The National Voting Rights Institute is a Boston-based, non-partisan, non-profit organization committed to making real the promise of American democracy that meaningful political participation and power should be accessible to all regardless of economic or social status. NVRI represents a number of organizations and individuals defending the constitutionality of the Vermont law.

The State PIRGs – a national network of nonprofit, nonpartisan public interest advocacy organizations – work to preserve the environment, protect consumers, and promote accountable government. With 20,000 members statewide, Vermont PIRG is Vermont’s largest environmental and consumer watchdog organization.

Copies of the NVRI brief, as well as all of the filings in this case, are available on the NVRI website at http://www.nvri.org/campaignspending/cs_supremecourt.html.

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