In his campaign-finance case before the U.S. Supreme Court, the most difficult aspect for Professor D. Bruce La Pierre has been not matching wits with legal giants during oral arguments, but rather the waiting game that has ensued.

Having argued in favor of an appeals court decision striking down Missouri's contribution limits to political candidates on October 5, 1999, La Pierre officially has entered litigator's limbo. "Nobody knows when the Supreme Court decision will come down," said La Pierre, who opposes the limits. "There is nothing left that I can do. It's been a long haul, and I'm eager to see the outcome."

In 1994, the Missouri legislature and voters approved separate amendments to the state's Campaign Finance Disclosure Law. The amendments included the state's first-ever limits on campaign contributions to state and local candidates. In 1995, La Pierre persuaded the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit to overturn the amendments' expenditure limits.

In the most recent phase, La Pierre represents Shrink Missouri Government, a political action committee, and Zev David Fredman, a 1998 Republican primary state auditor candidate, in their challenge to the legislative amendment, Senate Bill 650. The current contribution limits are $275, $525, and $1,075, depending upon the size of the population represented and the particular political office. Last year, the Court of Appeals found these limits unconstitutional, paving the way for the state's appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

La Pierre views the current campaign-finance case, which is being closely watched by the political establishment, as a matter of protecting the fundamental First Amendment right to political speech. Backers of the limits argue they prevent political corruption. "Missouri has no evidence that campaign contributions cause any 'real harm,' " La Pierre said. "In the absence of harm, there is no warrant to restrict the most important of First Amendment rights--political speech and association. It is difficult to see how the government can be justified in limiting speech when there is no proof of a problem."

When the Supreme Court last fully considered the issue in 1976 in *Buckley v. Valeo*, it found
corruption and the appearance of corruption as a justification for regulating contributions to federal candidates.

By all accounts, the Court could easily come down either way. The case has drawn a lot of interest, in part because it could have repercussions for similar limits in roughly a dozen other states as well as for federal limits.

Preparation, anticipation, and a healthy dose of adrenaline ultimately carried La Pierre through his 30 minutes of oral argument before the Supreme Court. "It was a tremendous experience. I enjoyed the exchange of questions and answers," La Pierre said. "I was impressed that regardless of the particular sympathies of the justices, all of the questions were designed to elicit answers that would lead to the best possible resolution of the case. It was an interesting intellectual exchange with, of course, important practical consequences."

La Pierre even welcomed the now often-quoted question by Justice Stephen Breyer--should Ebenezer Scrooge be allowed to donate $15 million to a favored candidate?

Now, as he awaits the decision, La Pierre wouldn't mind a visit from the Ghost of the Supreme Court Yet to Come.

Professor La Pierre earned an AB from Princeton University and a JD from Columbia University. He teaches Civil Rights, Constitutional Law, and Federal Jurisdiction.