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# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2805

December 18, 2007

119 RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2805  
(202) 224-6244

333 LAS VEGAS BOULEVARD, SOUTH  
SUITE 8203  
LAS VEGAS, NV 89101  
(702) 388-6605

400 SOUTH VIRGINIA STREET  
SUITE 738  
RENO, NV 89501  
(775) 686-5770

600 EAST WILLIAM STREET  
SUITE 304  
CARSON CITY, NV 89701  
(775) 885-9111

website: [ensign.senate.gov](http://ensign.senate.gov)

Mr. Christopher Hansen  
2657 Windmill Parkway, #107  
Henderson, Nevada 89074

Dear Mr. Hansen:

Thank you for contacting Senator John Ensign's office with your request for the legal definition of a dollar. After contacting the Congressional Research Service with your request, they have directed me to a report that explains the definition of a dollar from the 1856 edition of the Bouvier's Law Dictionary, to the 1986 edition of Black's Law, Second Pocket Edition, and explained that the definition of a dollar is actually quite fluid. I have enclosed that report, and I hope it will be of help to you.

When we spoke on the phone, you also mentioned that your question was related to campaign contributions. CRS suggested that you study the Federal Election Campaign Act which can be found at the website, [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov).

If this office can assist you with another federal matter, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Mary Mason  
Special Assistant

/mm  
Enclosure

## Definition of "Dollar"

Bouvier's Law Dictionary, 1856 Edition

DOLLAR, money. A silver coin of the United States of the value of one hundred cents, or tenth part of an eagle.

2. It weighs four hundred and twelve and a half grains. Of one thousand parts, nine hundred are of pure silver and one hundred of alloy. Act of January 18, 1837, ss. 8 & 9, 4 Sharsw. Cont. of Story's L. U. S. 2523, 4; Wright, R. 162.

3. In all computations at the custom-house, the specie dollar of Sweden and Norway shall be estimated at one hundred and six cents. The specie dollar of Denmark, at one hundred and five cents. Act of May 22, 1846.

CENT, money. A copper coin of the United States of the value of ten mills; ten of them are equal to a dime, and one hundred, to one dollar. Each cent is required to contain one hundred and sixty-eight grains. Act of January 18th, 1837, 4 Sharsw. cont. of Story',s L. U. S. 2524.

Blacks Law Dictionary, 1st Edition (1891)

DOLLAR. The unit employed in the United States in calculating money values. It is coined both in gold and silver, and is of the value of one hundred cents.

CENT. A coin of the United States, the least in value of those now minted. It is the hundredth part of a dollar. Its weight is 72 gr., and it is composed of copper and nickel in the ratio of 88 to 12.

Blacks Law Dictionary, 3rd Edition (1933)

DOLLAR. The unit employed in the United States in calculating money values. It is coined both in gold and silver, and is of the value of one hundred cents. Thompson v. State, 90 Rex. Cr. R. 125, 234 S. W. 406, 408.

Blacks Law Dictionary, 4th Edition (1951)

DOLLAR. The unit employed in the United States in calculating money values. It is coined both in gold and silver, and is of the value of one hundred cents.

People v. Alba 46 Cal.App.2d 859, 117 P.2d 63. Money or currency issued by lawful authority and intended to pass and circulated as such. Neufield v. United States, 118 f,2d 375, 387, 73 App.D.C. 174. The dollar of nine-tenths fine consisting of the weight determined under the 31 U.S.C.A. Â§ 321, shall be the standard unit of value, and all forms of money issued or coined shall be maintained at a parity of value with this standard. 31 U.S.C.A. Â§ 314.

Blacks Law Dictionary, 4th Edition Revised (1957)

DOLLAR. The unit employed in the United States in calculating money values. It is of the value of 100 cents. People v. Alba, 46 Cal.App.2d 859, 117 P.2d 63.

Money or currency issued by lawful authority and intended to pass and circulated as such. Neufield v. United States, 118 f,2d 375, 387, 73 App.D.C. 174.

Blacks Law Dictionary, 5th Edition (1968)

Dollar. The money unit employed in the United States of the value of one hundred cents, or any combination of coins totalling one hundred cents.

Blacks Law Dictionary, 6th Edition (1979)

Dollar. The money unit employed in the United States of the value of one hundred cents, or any combination of coins totalling one hundred cents.

Cent. A coin of the United States, the least in value of those now minted. It is the hundredth part of a dollar.

Blacks Law Dictionary, 7th Edition (current edition)

(No definition for "dollar" or "cent" found)

Ballentines Law Dictionary, 2nd Edition (1930 & 1948)

Dollar (dol'ar). " There is no ambiguity about the word 'dollar'." If any word

has a settled meaning at law, and in the courts, it is this. It can only mean the legal currency of the United States, not dollars vested in lands. A dollar is the volume of money, and is by law made a money unit value of the value of one hundred cents. See State v. Downs, 148 Ind. 324, 327.

Ballentines Law Dictionary, 3rd Edition (1969)  
 dollar. The legal currency of the United States; State v Downs, 148 Ind 324, 327; the unit of money consisting of one hundred cents. The aggregate of specific coins which add up to one dollar. 36 Am J1st Money Â§ 8. In the absence of qualifying words, it cannot mean promissory notes, bonds, or other evidences of debt. 36 AM J1st Money Â§ 8. (Emphasis Added)

American Jurisprudence, Volume 36, Â§ 8  
 [T]he term "dollar" means money, since it is the unit of money in this country, and in the absence of qualifying words, it cannot mean promissory notes or bonds or other evidences of debt. The term also refers to specific coins of the value of one dollar. (27 Ohio Jur pp. 125, 126, Â§ 3), (United States v. Van Auken, 96 US 366, 24 L ed 852)

Black's Law, Second Pocket Edition (1996)  
 Federal Reserve Note  
 Federal reserve note. The paper currency in circulation in the United States. The notes are issued by the Federal Reserve Banks, are effectively non-interest-bearing promissory notes payable to bearer on demand, and are issued in denominations of \$1, \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50, \$100, \$500, \$1,000, \$5,000, and \$10,000. (Emphasis Added)

Title 18 Â§ 8. - Obligation or other security of the United States defined  
 The term "obligation or other security of the United States" includes all bonds, certificates of indebtedness, national bank currency, Federal Reserve notes, Federal Reserve bank notes, coupons, United States notes, Treasury notes, gold certificates, silver certificates, fractional notes, certificates of deposit, bills, checks, or drafts for money, drawn by or upon authorized officers of the United States, stamps and other representatives of value, of whatever denomination, issued under any Act of Congress, and canceled United States stamps. (Emphasis Added)