

1606 Will Open Loopholes in Soft Money

WNY Media Network

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Washington, DC - In a letter sent yesterday, five national reform groups urged House members to vote against H.R.1606, which would open huge soft money loopholes in the federal campaign finance laws. The bill is expected to be voted on by the House next week.

The groups included the Campaign Legal Center, Democracy 21, the League of Women Voters, Public Citizen and U.S. PIRG.

H.R. 1606 is sponsored by Representative Jeb Hensarling (R-Texas) and would exempt communications on the Internet from the campaign finance laws.

According to the letter, "This is a time when the House should be acting on legislation to respond to the campaign finance, lobbying and ethics scandals facing the Congress and the nation."

The letter added, "The last thing the House should be doing is passing legislation that would again allow Members to use influence -- buying soft money to finance their campaigns. That, however, is precisely what the Hensarling bill would allow."

The letter from the reform groups urged Members to oppose H.R.1606, "which would open gaping soft money loopholes in the campaign finance laws by allowing members of Congress and political parties to use corrupting soft money to pay for Internet ads to support Members' campaigns."

According to the letter, "Our groups strongly support the free speech rights of bloggers and believe that the Internet is an important and positive development for political discourse and activities, and for increasing the number of small donors in politics."

The letter continued, "The blanket Internet exemption in the Hensarling bill, however, is not simply about protecting the rights of bloggers, but rather would open huge loopholes in the campaign finance laws to allow members of Congress and political parties to return corrupting, unlimited soft money to federal campaigns."

The letter stated, "For example, under H.R. 1606, a Washington lobbyist such as Jack Abramoff could provide an unlimited amount of corrupt soft money for a member of Congress to use in buying campaign ads run on the Internet."

The letter said, "This could happen, for example, by a Member, in coordination with the lobbyist, preparing campaign ads, choosing where and how often to run them on the Internet and then turning the ads over to the lobbyist to spend large amounts of soft money to run the ads on the Internet."

According to the letter, "Under H.R. 1606, a corporation or labor union also could provide an unlimited amount of corrupting soft money to a state political party for the party to use to pay for campaign ads on the Internet supporting a member of Congress, or attacking the Member's opponent."

The letter states, "H.R. 1606 ignores the corruption and lobbying scandals in Congress that grow more troubling each day and instead would return us to the scandals caused by the use of soft money in federal elections, prior to the passage of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002."

According to the letter, "The funds used by candidates and parties to buy campaign ads to influence federal elections should be covered by the same campaign finance rules, regardless of whether the ads are purchased on television, in the newspapers or on the Internet."

On November 2, 2005 the House rejected H.R. 1606, after the bill was considered on the suspension calendar and failed to receive the two-thirds vote required to pass bills on the suspension calendar.