

USA Today Article Shows Senate Ready to Increase Lobbyist Disclosure While It Continues to Lag on Electronic Disclosure Itself

The Campaign Finance Institute

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Will Senators this week vote to give the public better access to information on lobbyist's expenditures without giving the public similar access to information about their own political contributions?

Monday's USA Today featured the enclosed article entitled, "Senate System Drags Out Financial-Data Disclosure: Lawmakers go through laborious process rather than file electronically." The article underlined the Campaign Finance Institute research on individual contributions to Senate candidates in the 2004 election which showed that "85% of contributions in the last critical quarter before the elections were not accessible on the Internet three days before the election."

Nine Senators, five Republicans and four Democrats, have co-sponsored S. 1508 which would mandate Senate electronic filing of campaign reports. The bipartisan Federal Election Commission has endorsed the bill as a priority recommendation. Yet the legislation, including a previous version, has languished in the Senate Rules and Administration Committee since 2003.

Senator Russ Feingold, the original sponsor of S. 1508, urged the Rules Committee to include the legislation in the "transparency" bill going to the floor this week. The Committee did not. CFI hopes the Senate will insert the provision into the merged transparency/lobbying reform bill.

"This is a nonpartisan issue that should be dealt with now in the context of the "transparency" and "lobbying disclosure" legislation coming before the Senate this week" said CFI Executive Director Michael Malbin. Six years ago Congress required presidential and house candidates, non-Senate national party committees, and Political Action Committees report their finances electronically so that information can be rapidly downloaded or searched on the Internet. And three years ago so-called 527 political groups were obliged to file electronically. "How can the Senate now vote to make lobbyists disclose electronically when they refuse to do so themselves? Americans should not be led to believe that Senators are trying to hide something," concluded Malbin.