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CONTACT: WALT RIKER
(202) 224-5358

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

DEMOCRATS BAIL OUT ON CAMPAIGN REFORM

I WAS VERY SURPRISED TO READ IN THIS WEEKEND'S NEWSPAPERS ABOUT THE COLLAPSE OF THE BIPARTISAN CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM NEGOTIATIONS.

I UNDERSTAND THAT SENATOR MCCONNELL, THE LEADER OF THE REPUBLICAN NEGOTIATING TEAM, ALSO LEARNED -- THROUGH THE NEWSPAPERS -- ABOUT THE DEMOCRATS' UNILATERAL DECISION TO DISCONTINUE THE NEGOTIATIONS.

IT IS UNFORTUNATE THAT MY COLLEAGUES ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE AISLE BELIEVE THAT BIPARTISAN NEGOTIATIONS AREN'T WORTH PURSUING ANYMORE.

THERE WAS BIPARTISAN CONSENSUS ON THE NEED FOR A MEANINGFUL BROADCAST DISCOUNT. THERE WAS BIPARTISAN CONSENSUS ON THE NEED TO REDUCE THE INFLUENCE OF SPECIAL INTERESTS BY RESTRICTING PAC CONTRIBUTIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS FROM INDIVIDUALS LIVING OUTSIDE OF A CANDIDATE'S HOME STATE. THERE WAS BIPARTISAN CONSENSUS ON THE NEED TO CURTAIL THE PRACTICE OF BUNDLING AND TO CLOSE THE MILLIONAIRE'S LOOPHOLE THAT NOW EXISTS IN FEDERAL LAW.

THERE WAS BIPARTISAN CONSENSUS -- IN OTHER WORDS -- ON AN ENTIRE MENU OF VERY IMPORTANT REFORM ISSUES. BUT THIS CONSENSUS HAS APPARENTLY BEEN SACRIFICED AT THE ALTAR OF RIGID, ARBITRARILY-DETERMINED SPENDING LIMITS THAT DISADVANTAGE CHALLENGERS AND PROMOTE INCUMBENCY.

I URGE MY COLLEAGUES TO NOTE THIS SIMPLE FACT: ONLY 7 OF THE 32 WINNING SENATE CHALLENGERS FROM 1978 TO 1988 STAYED WITHIN THE SPENDING LIMITS OUTLINED IN S. 137. OBVIOUSLY, THESE ARE PRETTY LOW NUMBERS. THEY'RE ALSO PRETTY GOOD NUMBERS, PARTICULARLY IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN SEEING THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY MAINTAIN ITS LOCK IN CONGRESS THROUGH THE 21ST CENTURY.

THIS IS THE VIEW OF VIRTUALLY EVERY CAMPAIGN FINANCE SCHOLAR WHO HAS STUDIED THE ISSUE. IT'S THE VIEW OF THE COMMITTEE FOR THE STUDY OF THE AMERICAN ELECTORATE, A NONPARTISAN RESEARCH GROUP, WHICH RECENTLY CONCLUDED THAT THE SPENDING LIMITS CONTAINED IN THE S. 137 WOULD FAVOR SENATE INCUMBENTS. AND IT HAPPENS TO BE THE VIEW OF PRESIDENT BUSH, WHO HAS PUBLICLY THREATENED TO VETO ANY BILL THAT CONTAINS A RIGID SPENDING-LIMITS MEASURE.

SENATOR MITCHELL AND I WILL SIT DOWN AND DISCUSS WHAT THE NEXT STEP SHOULD BE. BUT SINCE DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS APPEAR TO AGREE ON MANY -- IF NOT MOST -- OF THE KEY CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM ISSUES, IT REMAINS MY HOPE THAT BIPARTISAN NEGOTIATIONS COULD RESUME SOMETIME LATER THIS WEEK.

THERE'S SIMPLY TOO MUCH AT STAKE, AND TOO MANY AREAS OF AGREEMENT, TO THROW IN THE CAMPAIGN REFORM TOWEL WITHOUT FURTHER DISCUSSIONS.

LET THERE BE NO MISTAKE ABOUT IT: THE SENATE CAN PASS A COMPREHENSIVE AND TRULY MEANINGFUL CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM BILL, AND IT CAN PASS SUCH A BILL THIS YEAR.

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BUT WE WILL NOT HAVE REFORM IF ONE PARTY AT THE NEGOTIATING TABLE CHOOSES TO WALK LOCK-STEP WITH COMMON CAUSE AND THE LIBERAL MEDIA. AND WE WILL NOT HAVE REFORM IF REFORM MEANS PARTISAN ADVANTAGE FOR ONE PARTY AND PARTISAN DISADVANTAGE FOR THE OTHER. SENATE REPUBLICANS CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT THE REAL CAMPAIGN FINANCE CULPRIT IS NOT CAMPAIGN SPENDING, BUT THE SPECIAL-INTEREST SOURCES OF CAMPAIGN FUNDS.

THAT'S WHY WE RECENTLY INTRODUCED THE COMPREHENSIVE CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM ACT OF 1990, A 34-POINT PLAN THAT PUTS THE PACS OUT-OF-BUSINESS, THAT BANS "SOFT" MONEY, THAT RESTRICTS THE PRACTICE OF BUNDLING, AND THAT REDUCES THE CONTRIBUTION LIMITS FOR OUT-OF-STATE RESIDENTS BY A FULL 50% -- FROM \$1,000 TO \$500.

IF BIPARTISAN NEGOTIATIONS DO INDEED FAIL -- AS THEY MAY -- MY REPUBLICAN COLLEAGUES BELIEVE THAT WE HAVE A REFORM PLAN THAT MAKES SENSE, THAT WORKS, AND THAT HAS THE SUPPORT OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

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