

News from Senator

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Statement of Senator Bob Dole

WHOSE SMOKESCREEN IS IT ANYWAY?

LATER THIS MORNING WE WILL RESUME DEBATE ON CAMPAIGN FINANCING LEGISLATION. THE DEBATE HAS UNFORTUNATELY, BUT I SUPPOSE INEVITABLY, BEEN POLITICIZED. CHARGES ARE BEING MADE THAT THE REPUBLICANS ARE OBSTRUCTIONISTS -- THAT WE ARE ANTI-REFORM -- THAT OUR OPPOSITION TO PUBLIC FINANCING IS MERELY A "SMOKESCREEN" FOR OUR OPPOSITION TO CHANGING THE STATUS QUO.

WELL, ALL I CAN SAY IS, WHAT A DIFFERENCE A YEAR MAKES. A YEAR AGO THE CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM BILL BEFORE THE SENATE -- THE SO-CALLED BOREN-GOLDWATER PACKAGE -- HAD THE SUPPORT OF A BROAD COALITION OF MEMBERS FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE AISLE. THERE WERE SOME DIFFERENCES ON SPECIFICS -- BUT THE MEASURE HAD SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT. AND THE BILL DID NOT, AND I REITERATE DID NOT, CONTAIN PUBLIC FINANCING.

ONE MIGHT ASK THE QUESTION AS TO WHY PUBLIC FINANCING IS NOW SUDDENLY AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT IN CAMPAIGN REFORM WHEN IT WASN'T LAST YEAR.

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT ANY DISCUSSION OF CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM SHOULD BE BASED ON THE SUPPOSITION THAT THE CHANGES WILL INSURE BROADER -- NOT MORE RESTRICTED -- PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS.

PUBLIC FINANCING

PUBLIC FINANCING OF SENATE CAMPAIGNS IMPINGES ON AN INDIVIDUAL'S RIGHT TO SUPPORT VOLUNTARILY THOSE POLITICAL CANDIDATES OF HIS OR HER CHOICE. PUBLIC FINANCING DIMINISHES -- NOT INCREASES -- AN INDIVIDUAL'S OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS. IN FACT, I BELIEVE THE BILL POSES SERIOUS QUESTIONS REGARDING FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS OF BOTH THE INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS AND THE CANDIDATES.

DURING THE WEEKENDS I SPEND A LOT OF TIME TRAVELING AROUND THE COUNTRY, SPEAKING TO ORDINARY CITIZENS. THEY'RE CONCERNED ABOUT A LOT OF THINGS -- ABOUT THE FEDERAL DEFICIT, ABOUT ARMS

CONTROL, ABOUT CRIME; I DON'T GET A LOT OF QUESTIONS OR COMPLAINTS ABOUT CAMPAIGN FINANCING. SO I RAISE THE ISSUE, BECAUSE HERE IN WASHINGTON IT APPEARS TO BE A PRIORITY CONCERN. AND WHEN I ASK THE QUESTION WHETHER THESE PEOPLE WANT TO SUBSIDIZE SENATE CAMPAIGNS WITH THEIR TAXES, THE ANSWER IS A RESOUNDING "NO."

RIGHT NOW BUDGET CONFEREES -- AT LEAST THE DEMOCRATIC ONES -- ARE STRUGGLING TO COME UP WITH A FISCAL 1988 BUDGET. I BELIEVE IF YOU ASKED THEM, WHAT WOULD YOU THINK OF CREATING A NEW GOVERNMENT "ENTITLEMENT PROGRAM" COSTING MILLIONS OF DOLLARS, THEY WOULDN'T LOOK KINDLY UPON IT. AND YET THAT IS WHAT PUBLIC FINANCING OF SENATE CAMPAIGNS WOULD BE -- AN OUTRIGHT SUBSIDY FOR THOSE SEEKING RE-ELECTION.

OTHER MEANINGFUL REFORMS

YET AS OPPOSED AS THIS SENATOR IS TO PUBLIC FINANCING, THERE ARE OTHER WAYS IN WHICH WE CAN MAKE MEANINGFUL CHANGES TO THE PRESENT CAMPAIGN FINANCE SYSTEM. AND I BELIEVE THE COMPROMISE PACKAGE, INTRODUCED BY SEN. STEVENS LAST WEEK, ADDRESSES MANY OF THOSE CONCERNS.

FOR INSTANCE, THE STEVENS AMENDMENT INCORPORATES THOSE LIMITS ON CONTRIBUTIONS FOR BOTH INDIVIDUALS AND POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEES THAT WERE CONTAINED IN THE BOREN-GOLDWATER BILL. THIS ADJUSTMENT IN CONTRIBUTION LIMITS ADDRESSES CONCERNS ABOUT CANDIDATE DEPENDENCY ON PAC CONTRIBUTIONS, AND ALLOWS POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS TO RELY MORE ON THE INDIVIDUAL AS THE TRADITIONAL SOURCE OF FUNDING.

KEY TO THE SUCCESS OF ANY SIGNIFICANT CAMPAIGN REFORM, IN MY OPINION, IS DISCLOSURE. COMMON CAUSE CALLS OUR CURRENT FINANCE SYSTEM A "NATIONAL SCANDAL"; AND THE WASHINGTON POST SAYS THE SYSTEM IS FUNDAMENTALLY CORRUPT." WELL, IF ANY PORTION OF OUR CURRENT SYSTEM HAS A POTENTIAL FOR MEETING THESE DEFINITIONS, IT IS THE FAILURE OF THE SYSTEM TO PROVIDE FOR FULL REPORTING OF POLITICAL EXPENDITURES. AND THAT INCLUDES THE DISCLOSURE OF "SOFT MONEY" EXPENDITURES BY CORPORATIONS, LABOR UNIONS, NATIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES AND POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEES FOR ACTIVITIES SUCH AS "GET OUT THE VOTE" OR "VOTER REGISTRATION.

I'M ALSO WILLING TO CONSIDER LIMITATIONS ON THESE SOFT-MONEY CONTRIBUTIONS AND, IN CONJUNCTION WITH SUCH LIMITATIONS, A FURTHER TIGHTENING OF AMOUNTS PACS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO CANDIDATES.

MY COLLEAGUES ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE AISLE WHO SUPPORT PUBLICLY SUBSIDIZED ELECTIONS SAY THEY ARE READY TO COMPROMISE, YET THE SO-CALLED MIDDLE-GROUND SUBSTITUTE INTRODUCED LAST WEEK IS SIMPLY THAT -- A SUBSTITUTE, AND NO REAL COMPROMISE.

THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT WE SHOULD CONCENTRATE OUR EFFORTS ON ABUSES IN THE CURRENT SYSTEM, CORRECT THOSE ABUSES, AND ELIMINATE THE LOOPHOLES.

WE SHOULD ENCOURAGE INDIVIDUAL INVOLVEMENT AND COMMITMENT. WE SHOULD EXPECT THAT THOSE SEEKING OFFICE WILL GO TO THE PUBLIC, NOT THE PUBLIC TROUGH, FOR THEIR SUPPORT.