

## **VOTE AGAINST H.R. 1606, WHICH WOULD ALLOW MEMBERS TO USE CORRUPTING SOFT MONEY IN THEIR CAMPAIGNS**

February 28, 2006

Dear Representative,

The undersigned groups strongly urge you to oppose H.R.1606, introduced by Representative Jeb Hensarling (R-TX), 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.

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

It is our understanding that H.R. 1606 is being scheduled for a floor vote in the House next week, even as the FEC is scheduled to act on March 16 on new regulations that could affirm that bloggers are not covered by campaign finance laws.

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 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 current Washington lobbying and corruption scandals have the potential to be the biggest congressional scandal in modern times. At the core of these scandals was the use of campaign contributions, including soft money, and other financial favors to buy influence with members of Congress.

While the full scope and extent of the lobbying scandals in Congress is yet to be determined, public opinion polls have made clear that citizens are deeply concerned about corruption in government.

According to a *CNN/USA Today/Gallup* poll (January 10, 2006), "corruption ranked among the concerns most often cited by those polled, with 43 percent telling pollsters it would be an 'extremely important' issue in 2006," just two percent below the 45 percent response for the war in Iraq and terrorism.

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 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

We strongly urge you to vote against H.R. 1606 and to only support legislation in this area that does not allow the return of corrupting soft money to federal campaigns.

Campaign Legal Center  
Democracy 21  
League of Women Voters

Public Citizen  
US PIRG