

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

Campaign Finance Tactics

In one of its finest moments, the House of Representatives listened to its collective conscience Tuesday night and passed the Shays-Meehan campaign finance reform bill. Representative Christopher Shays reflected both the historic importance of the vote and the tremendous challenge ahead with an apt comparison to the great civil rights debates of the 1960's. As they did a generation ago, proponents of progress will now have to force an obstructionist minority in the Senate to face vote after vote to expose their motives. It may, therefore, be the moment to consider tactical changes in the legislation if there is a possibility of winning more Republicans on the next vote.

The focus of attention now turns to John McCain — Presidential candidate, Vietnam War hero and anti-establishment Senator from Arizona. With Russ Feingold of Wisconsin, Mr. McCain has pushed for a ban on unregulated "soft money" to political parties since President Clinton's out-of-control 1996 re-election campaign. Unlike most Republicans, Mr. McCain was not content to deplore Mr. Clinton's excesses. The McCain-Feingold bill would ban soft money to parties and extend Federal regulations to money raised by independent groups for campaign ads two months before an election.

Today Mr. McCain and Mr. Feingold are planning to introduce a stripped-down version of that bill, eliminating the curbs on fund-raising for so-called "issue ads" by independent groups. In effect, they are calling the bluff of Trent Lott, the majority leader, and his fund-raiser in chief, Mitch McConnell, who have obsessively focused on the issue-ad curbs as a violation of free speech. This is a risky change. Banning unlimited money for political parties might lead to the money going to bogus groups for use in even more destructive campaigns. The Democrats and Republicans in the House who bravely stood by the issue-ad controls against relentless attacks by special interests will no doubt be upset over such a concession.

But with the issue-ad curbs out of the bill, there will at least be no excuse for other Republicans not to sign on to reform. However distrustful and upset they may be, Democrats should be prepared to go along. Reform, like any other large cause, is never something that gets achieved overnight. The battle to rid American politics of corruption has been fought since the late 19th century. Allowing independent groups to raise unlimited money for phony issue ads is far from ideal. But a ban on soft money for the parties would be a significant step in the long, grinding effort to drive corrupt money out of the process.

It is clear from the 252-to-177 vote in the House

that a strong consensus in both parties favors reform. More than a quarter of the Republican Party's members in the House defied their leadership and supported the bill, sending a strong message to the Senate, where campaign reform is supported by all 45 Democrats and 7 Republicans. That adds up to 52 votes, a majority that can only be thwarted by the determination of Mr. Lott to engineer a filibuster to kill the bill. To get the McCain-Feingold bill passed, 60 votes are needed to cut off the filibuster.

Many of the Republican holdouts say they oppose campaign reform, especially the curbs on independent groups, as an infringement of free speech. But the ban on corporations contributing to candidates has been in effect since 1907. The ban on donations by unions was enacted in 1947, and the Watergate-era ceiling on contributions to candidates by individuals and political action groups has been in effect for 25 years. Extending these curbs to political parties is not a radical change.

Mr. McCain is also making a novel argument to these Republicans that campaign reform might even make tax cuts for the average citizen more achievable. The \$792 billion tax cut bill passed this summer was loaded with so many favors for individual businesses, stuffed into the bill because of campaign donations, that hardly any money was left over for taxpayers of modest means.

If these Senators are not willing to listen to voters demanding reform, then they should listen to a growing chorus of business leaders who are also demanding a ban on soft money. The Committee for Economic Development began by enlisting executives from General Electric, Merck, Xerox and Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu. Its ranks are growing with executives from Hasbro, Prudential, International Paper and State Farm Insurance. Businessmen use words like legalized bribery to describe the current fund-raising system.

Mr. McCain should direct his lobbying to Republicans with a record of some independence or those who have complained eloquently about being forced to become fund-raising automatons. Now is the time for Republicans like Richard Lugar of Indiana, William Roth of Delaware, John Warner of Virginia, Chuck Hagel of Nebraska and George Voinovich and Mike DeWine of Ohio to show some of the gumption their constituents have come to appreciate. As for Democrats unhappy about dropping the regulation of independent "issue ads," we understand the difficulty of dropping a vital measure long supported by this page. But it makes sense to win what is achievable now and then move on to greater battles to come.

The New York Times

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1999

In America

BOB HERBERT

Justice, New York Style

Celeste Goring-Johnson would be considered a soccer mom if she were white and lived somewhere other than Brooklyn.

She is 42 years old, married and the mother of three children. She's an accountant with the city's Department of Youth and Community Development. Her husband of nearly 16 years, Richard Johnson, is a train operator for the Transit Authority. The family owns a brownstone on Hancock Street.

On Aug. 21, a Saturday, Mrs. Johnson drove two of her children, Elizabeth, 14, and Josiah, 3, to Kings Highway for a dental appointment.

"I took them inside, then I went back out to put some extra coins in the meter," she said.

She noticed a jewelry store nearby and went in to get ring guards for a couple of her rings. That took less than 10 minutes and cost \$6. She paid and was about to leave the store when the proprietor locked the front door and declared that a diamond ring was missing. He said no one could leave.

Mrs. Johnson recalled in an interview on Tuesday that there were several other customers and employees in the store. But the owner, Scott Middleberg, got it into his head that Mrs. Johnson had stolen the ring.

Thus the nightmare began.

Mrs. Johnson said she had not stolen anything. Mr. Middleberg asked to search her handbag.

She gave him the handbag and he looked through it. No ring. He said he wanted to search her pockets.

"I didn't want to feel this man on my person," she said. So she told him no.

Mr. Middleberg, according to Mrs. Johnson, said that if she didn't cooperate he would have to call the police. Mrs. Johnson thought that was an excellent idea, and told him so.

The police were called. Other customers left the store.

Four officers responded. Mr. Middleberg is reported to have told them that he had a videotape showing that Mrs. Johnson was the only person who had been near the ring that supposedly was missing. The cops looked at the tape. They searched Mrs. Johnson, including her pockets. No ring.

Case closed, right?

Not in New York in this day and age. Celeste Goring-Johnson, a solid citizen who has never been in trouble with the law, whose children were waiting at the dentist's for their mother to return, who never in her life

imagined that she might be charged with a crime, was turned around, handcuffed and placed under arrest.

"It was so humiliating," Mrs. Johnson said. "They took me outside in handcuffs, and by this time people were gathering to watch."

Someone brought the children outside and they saw their mother being hauled toward a police car. An officer asked Mrs. Johnson if she wanted the children turned over to the police. She said no, they should wait at the dentist's office until their father could pick them up.

This is the kind of city we live in now. It's a city in which a woman who had voluntarily undergone two searches can nevertheless be dragged away in handcuffs, presumably because she was near an item that was reported missing.

Mrs. Johnson's humiliation was just beginning. She was taken to the 61st Precinct station house, where she was strip-searched. Her mouth was searched. Hands were run all through her hair. She was made to squat, etc. No ring was found.

Case finally closed, right?

Since when is proximity a crime?

Not in this town. Not in this era. Mrs. Johnson was fingerprinted. Her mug shot was taken. And she was handcuffed to a chair in the station house, where she remained for several hours.

And despite the absence of any evidence whatsoever, she was charged with a crime — petty larceny, a Class A misdemeanor.

Mrs. Johnson is being represented by the Manhattan lawyer David Everett. He had her take a polygraph test, which she passed with no trouble. He went to see Mr. Middleberg, who, according to Mr. Everett, "acknowledged that he never saw her take the ring."

Mr. Everett asked to view the store's videotape of Mrs. Johnson. He said Mr. Middleberg told him it no longer existed. He had recorded over it.

Meanwhile, the humiliation of Mrs. Johnson is indelible, and the criminal charge, incredibly, is still pending. □

The New York Times

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1999

Clinton Finance -

9/15 Statement

STATEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT

I am heartened by ^{their} yesterday's vote in the House of Representatives ^{has} to reject the politics of business as usual by passing real bipartisan campaign finance reform. Passage of the Shays-Meehan campaign finance reform legislation ^{is} was a victory for the American people. Now I ask supporters of this legislation in the Senate to work with the Leadership of both parties to insure an up or down vote on this historic bill by the end of this year.

The American people have waited long enough. I challenge Congress to send this bipartisan bill to my desk so that we can begin to restore the faith of all Americans in our democracy.

Sincerely,

William Jefferson Clinton

Now I urge the Senate to do its part ^{and to} ~~pass~~ send me this historic bipartisan ~~bill~~ legislation. The time has come for Congress to redeem the public's faith in the health of our democracy.