



'Pretty Draconian'

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NOW THAT AMERICA HAS JUST FINISHED A RIP-SNORTING ELECTION THAT, AFTER YEARS OF COMPLAINTS about voter apathy, delivered the highest voter turnout in the history of the country, guess what Senator Schumer and his cohorts in the Anti-First Amendment Caucus want to do? They want to put out of business the 527 groups, such as America Coming Together and the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, that spent some \$423 million getting all those voters to the polls. "527 groups supporting both presidential candidates illegally raised and spent tens of millions of dollars in soft money on ads and partisan voter mobilization efforts to influence the presidential election," reads a horrified press release from an organization operating under the name Democracy 21.

It and the Anti-First Amendment Caucus - led by Mr. Schumer and Senators McCain and Feingold, along with Reps. Shays and Meehan - certainly wish the 527 activities were illegal. The solons have introduced the 527 Reform Act of 2005 so that regulators at the Federal Election Commission, who consider the 527 activity to be perfectly legal, will be forced to act. Call us crazy, but we don't think that more political debate and voter turnout are bad for American democracy, even if Mr. Meehan, in a fit of self-congratulation, said of 2002's campaign finance law, "We passed a bill that resulted in millions of new Americans who became energized by the political process in the last campaign, largely because we ended both parties' addiction to soft money."

In fact, it wasn't the Shays-Meehan bill that energized voters and brought them to the polls in record numbers. It was the debate fostered by MoveOn.org, the Swift Vets, and myriad other 527s, and precisely the voter mobilization efforts that these legislators now want to end. The new legislation would force independent 527 groups to register as political committees, to which individuals can give only \$5,000 a year to influence federal elections. "So no more \$1 million soft money contributions to pay for the get-out-the-vote efforts in the presidential campaign," promised Mr. Feingold. Perish the thought.

What are these politicians so afraid of? "What is it that every federally elected official should be concerned about 527s?" Mr. McCain asked rhetorically at a press conference last week. Here's the hypothetical scenario the senator is scared of: "Some billionaire," Mr. McCain explained, "doesn't like you in office and they decide to form a 527 and contribute \$10 million, \$20 million, and dive-bomb into your state or district. That should alarm every federally elected member of Congress." Indeed it should, since the voters might be persuaded and choose another candidate.

But George Soros tried this stunt in the last election, and guess what? It turns out that voters aren't so easy to purchase. The Soros millions failed to oust President Bush. Could it be that the voters are smarter

than even Mr. Soros? In any event, it's unlikely to be a coincidence that the proliferation of grassroots 527 groups coincided with record participation in the political process. And the more than 150,000 individuals who gave to the Swift Vets, to cite but one example, put their issues in the national spotlight and shaped public debate. Why would Mr. McCain want to shut up such citizens? At the press conference, a reporter asked Mr. McCain why he didn't go further in respect of the 527 groups, such as banning them outright. Mr. McCain replied by saying his new legislation is "pretty draconian." He said it.