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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mrs. EMERSON).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
May 5, 1998.

I hereby designate the Honorable JO ANN EMERSON to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NEWT GINGRICH,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 21, 1997, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. SNOWBARGER) for 5 minutes.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

Mr. SNOWBARGER. Madam Speaker, during the last year, many Members of Congress, independent organizations, and other political groups have been in touch with Congress to urge immediate action on reform of our Nation's campaign finance system. Because the Nation's attention has been piqued by ambitious claims that we are going to clean up politics, we face the very real danger of passing a bill, calling it reform, and, as a result, destroying any remaining credibility enjoyed by the Congress of the United States.

During the upcoming debate on campaign finance reform, we will undoubtedly see a great number of different competing plans for reform. Many will be dramatic changes, and some will be modest in scope. If this fair and open debate is to mean anything, we should at least agree on a set of principles with which to judge the various entries.

To my colleagues listening back in their offices, if your plan is to sit on the sidelines during the debate and try to judge this combination dance contest and beauty pageant, I would like to offer you a kind of score card for this event.

Madam Speaker, remember the dance contest and beauty pageants have standards that aid the judges in determining what an ideal candidate should look like. These principles should provide an excellent guide for scoring in the various proposals. The three cardinal principles that should be our guide are transparency, real accountability, and trusting the American people.

First is transparency. Any real reform should make our campaign system easier to understand for the average person. It is hard for voters to know what is going on, to get outraged, or to judge our conduct if we are always playing hide the ball.

Consider the recent Washington Post story about the Democratic National Committee's swapping hard dollars for soft money with their State affiliates. It is difficult for average citizens to be involved in the critique of that system if stunts like this are permitted.

Secondly, we should punish the offenders. The citizens are tired of all this talk about reform. They tar all of us with the same broad brush of accusations, and we need to get serious about granting enforcement authority to the FEC, Federal Election Commission, and the Justice Department.

If all we do is add five more new rules to the 10 that are already not enforced, what have we gained? We will only have succeeded in proving what the public already suspects; namely, that we were never really serious about reform.

The only way for Congress to earn back the trust and the respect of the people is to impose real punishment for breaking the rules.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, we should trust the good judgment of the American people. If we have learned nothing else about political reform since the first go-around in 1974, it is that we should not make Federal bureaucrats the sole watchdog of our electoral system.

Our axiom should be absolutely open campaigns. New technology allows immediate disclosure. So why set arbitrary limits on donations? The public, if informed in a timely manner, will hold elected officials accountable.

The present limits force candidates to spend all their time chasing dollars and far less time serving constituents. We should trust the people. The electorate may decide that $1 from tobacco companies and the Ku Klux Klan is unacceptable, while, at the same time, judging $50,000 from the candidate's parents is perfectly appropriate.

Madam Speaker, I have never taken money from tobacco companies and never would, but my constituents may not believe that because our system hides the donations in this maze of regulations. Why should we continue to tell the people what to do when we so often get it wrong.

It is for this reason I have introduced H.R. 3315, the Fair Elections and Political Accountability Act of 1998. This bill would honor all of the above principles and make progress towards destroying the confidence of the American people.

I will not claim that my bill is the perfect answer to everyone's gripe about our political system. Many of you will find things about it that you

☐ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., ☐ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.
Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.

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