

Testimony on Senate Bill No. 5

Co-chairs, members of the committee, I thank you for taking the time to listen to me this morning. My name is Matt Zagaja and I am an attorney who has worked and volunteered with many campaigns over the past thirteen years. Today I am here to share with you why I support the disclosure provisions in Senate Bill No. 5:

Disclosure is an Important Mechanism for Assessing Credibility

Today people are awash in a tsunami of information about their communities and government. Someone once asked me how they are supposed to determine what things they read are true and what are not. Unless you want to fact-check everything, the answer to this is to look at the source.

Disclosure allows viewers of political ads to more easily make these assessments. If I hear that George Soros or Karl Rove funds an ad it is easy to fit that into a context and decide how much weight to give it. Without that disclosure it is harder to fit the ad into a larger context and may also be more difficult to seek out opposing points of view to evaluate the ad.

Disclosure Will Reduce Negative Campaign Ads

One of the most common complaints I hear is that campaign ads are too negative. In spite of this universal complaint and a personal dislike of this form of campaigning by politicians, it remains pervasive. This may be because political professionals continue to harbor a belief that this kind of campaigning is effective. Yet in a poll conducted by the Knights of Columbus last year 78% of Americans stated they were mostly frustrated by the tone of campaigns in this country and 64% of them believe the negative tone is causing harm to the country.¹

Furthermore, anonymity fosters an environment where negative speech thrives. The satire website The Onion recently memorialized this problem with an article titled, "YouTube Reaches 1 Trillion Racist Comments."² However it is not limited to YouTube. You need only scroll down to the comments section of a popular news website to see readers hurl insults and factual inaccuracies at each other. While disclosure will not put an end to negative campaigning, it certainly should curtail it as individuals think twice about whether they want to be associated with attacks and negativity.

¹ *Campaign 2012: Civility Lost*, KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS,

http://www.kofc.org/un/en/resources/communications/kofc_civility_lost_july_2012.pdf.

² YouTube Reaches 1 Trillion Racist Comments, THE ONION, <http://www.theonion.com/articles/youtube-reaches-1-trillion-racist-comments,31766>.

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Disclosure Provides Important Information for the Public

The other important feature of disclosure is the ability of the public to use it to make other judgments about their government and policy. If a land developer begins running ads in favor of a certain politician the citizens probably want to know why. It could be something as simple as they went to high school together, but disclosure gives the public the opportunity to determine whether there are other motives. I think we are better off for knowing these things and being able to make these kinds of assessments.

Disclosure is good policy that works for many existing political entities. I see no reason certain entities or individuals should be given the special privilege of hiding. If people want to make anonymous attacks, the comments section of YouTube is still open. Thank you.