February 28, 2002

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the nearly one million members and supporters of the American Conservative Union, and the millions more represented by those groups who have co-signed this letter, I am writing to urge you to vote against the ill-conceived, unconstitutional Shays-Meehan Campaign Finance "Reform" bill, recently passed by the House.

As we have said all along, this is not a vote about politics, but a vote about principle. By voting NO, you will take the side of freedom and honor your oath to support and defend the U.S. Constitution. It is a shame that so many of your colleagues on both sides of the aisle seem ambivalent toward this fact, as did so many in the House.

Much of the debate over this legislation has focused on which party will be helped or hurt by its various provisions, with very few commentators addressing the core questions of whether or not the sorts of restrictions on political speech envisioned by the bill's authors are either wise or constitutional. We don't know which party will ultimately benefit or be hurt by this legislation and what's more, we don't care.

The bill you will be voting on redefines political speech and outlaws or criminalizes speech that every American has always thought protected by the First Amendment to our Constitution. Looked at from our perspective, you are about to be asked to vote on a bill that tells those who might want to criticize your actions in the future to just shut up.

That's perhaps something elected officials like you may want to be able to do, but seizing and exercising the power to do so and make it stick is just about the most anti-democratic act we can imagine you taking. So before you vote on this legislation, do yourself a favor. Think not about who will have a fundraising edge if the bill passes, but about what you will really be voting on -- the most significant legislative attempt to restrict First Amendment rights that has ever come this close to becoming law.

The folks who put this monstrosity together know that much of it is likely to be declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. That's why they insist that regardless of what the courts strike down, the rest of it should be allowed to go into effect. Their position is as simple as it is cynical -- prejudging the constitutionality of the legislation on which you vote is not your job. In that, they are dead, flat wrong.
Every Senator takes an oath to support and defend the Constitution. Voting for legislation that you believe inconsistent with the Constitution would violate that oath. Don't do that.

If you can honestly say you believe the restrictions on the very political speech that is at the core of what the founders wanted to protect when they adopted the First Amendment will be found constitutional, ignore this letter. But if you believe they won't pass muster by a court that actually believes in free speech, do everyone a favor by voting against it. Don't make the courts do your job.

Yours Sincerely,

David A. Keene
Chairman

Charles H. Cunningham
NRA – ILA

Lt. Col. Oliver L. North
Honorary Chairman, Freedom Alliance

Ward Connerly

Grover Norquist
Americans for Tax Reform

Paul M. Weyrich
Coalitions for America

L. Brent Bozell
Conservative Victory Company

Kellyanne Conway
The Polling Company / Woman Trend

Craig Shirley
Craig Shirley & Associates

Lewis K. Uhler
National Tax Limitation Committee

*Established 1964...The Nation's Oldest and Largest Grassroots Conservative Organization*
* = Organization listed for identification purposes only.

P.S. – We have included below the text of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which you may wish to review prior to casting your vote.

Amendment I to the U.S. Constitution:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”