

ACTION ALERT

U.S. House of Representatives May Act Soon on Legislation to Curb Rights of Citizen Groups

WASHINGTON (February 28, 2007)—Under pressure from liberal special-interest groups with names like “Democracy 21,” “OMB Watch,” and “Public Citizen,” U.S. House Democratic leaders may soon push for enactment of legislation that could seriously impede the ability of issue-oriented groups—such as NRLC and NRLC-affiliated organizations—to communicate effectively with both the general public and with government officials.

“These restrictive proposals are being advanced under cover of innocuous-sounding labels such as ‘ethics reform’ and ‘lobbying reform,’ but they are really aimed at making policymakers less accountable to ordinary citizens and grassroots-based citizen groups,” said NRLC Legislative Director Douglas Johnson. “The groups pushing for these restrictions want lawmakers and other government officials to be more responsive to pressure from certain elites, including bosses of liberal foundations, the pro-abortion mainstream news media, and powerful congressional committee chairmen.”

Currently, House Democratic leaders are considering pushing for two different types of new restrictions:

* So-called “grassroots lobbying” limitations. House Democratic leaders may seek legislation that would require, for the first time, registration and reporting by some individuals and groups who engage in efforts to stimulate members of the public to communicate with Members of Congress about pending legislation.

* The so-called “Executive Branch Reform Act” (H.R. 984), authored by Congressmen Henry Waxman (D-Ca.) and Tom Davis (R-Va.), that would require thousands of Executive Branch officials to file quarterly reports listing every letter, e-mail, fax, and verbal communication that they receive from any “private party” in which the communicator “seeks to influence official action by any officer or employee of the executive branch of the United States.” The bill defines “private party” as any person other than another government official or staff person.

Either or both of these proposals might be considered as part of an “ethics reform” package that House Democratic leaders are expected to unveil sometime in March, probably in the form of amendments to a bill already passed by the Senate (S. 1). The full House could consider the legislation in late March or in April.

“These proposals would seriously interfere with the activities of groups that keep the public informed about what is going on in Congress, and with the ability of citizen groups to effectively represent the views of their memberships to government officials,” Johnson said.

On January 18, during consideration of its “ethics reform” bill (S. 1), the Senate voted 55-43 to reject a proposal to regulate “grassroots lobbying.” The Senate vote was a win for a coalition of advocacy groups, including NRLC, the Family Research Council, the National Rifle

Association, the American Center for Law and Justice, the Free Speech Coalition, and the American Civil Liberties Union. (See February NRL News, page 9.)

Despite the Senate vote, pro-regulation groups are pushing the leaders of the newly installed Democratic majority to restore “grassroots lobbying” provisions when the House considers “ethics reform” legislation soon. Craig Holman, a lobbyist for the pro-regulation group Public Citizen, told National Journal, “They succeeded narrowly in getting it [the grassroots provision] removed in the Senate, but we are going to get it back in the House.”

Congressman Waxman and others are reportedly pushing for the sweeping restrictions on Executive Branch officials to be included in the same package.

NRLC’s Johnson warned, “A great deal of work needs to be done to persuade House members to also reject these attacks on our First Amendment rights—and it needs to be done quickly.”

ACTION REQUESTED

Further details on the House legislation will be posted on the NRLC website (www.nrlc.org), in the Legislative Action Center, when final legislation is introduced and action is scheduled by the House Democratic leadership. But don’t wait—go to the Legislative Action Center now (www.capwiz.com/nrlc/home/) and use the tools there to communicate with your U.S. House member’s office by e-mail and/or by phone.

Or, just pick up the phone and dial your representative in the U.S. House through the Capitol Switchboard, 202-225-3121. If you don’t know the name of your U.S. representative, just give the Capitol Switchboard operator your zip code and you will be connected with the correct office. Once connected, politely urge the representative “to oppose restrictions on grassroots lobbying during consideration of S. 1” and to “also oppose H.R. 984.” Tell the representative’s staff member that you would like to receive a letter explaining the representative’s position on the issue.

Please Keep NRLC in the Loop!

It will greatly assist NRLC’s lobbying efforts in defense of your rights if you send NRLC a copy of any response you receive from a representative regarding either the “Executive Branch Reform Act” (H.R. 984) or “grassroots lobbying” amendments to S. 1. You can send such copies either (1) by e-mail, to Legfederal@aol.com, or (2) by fax 202-347-3668, or (3) by U.S. mail to NRLC, Federal Legislation Dept., 512-10th Street, Northwest, Washington, D.C. 20004. Thank you!

Resources

To read a detailed story on the ongoing attack on “grassroots lobbying,” read, “Elitist special-interest groups press Congress to curb ‘grassroots lobbying,’ as NRLC fights back,” from National Right to Life News, at www.nrlc.org/FreeSpeech/NRLCFightsforGrassrootsLobbying.html.

To read a detailed article on the Waxman-Davis bill, which would discourage federal Executive Branch officials from communicating with “private parties”—like you—go to www.nrlc.org/FreeSpeech/WaxmanDavisArticle.pdf.