

## Free Speech For Me, But Not For Thee

by [Chris Berg](#)

In the year that has passed since the Supreme Court decided *Citizens United v. FEC*, the liberal elites have waged a war against the First Amendment. Liberal politicians including President Barack Obama and Senator Harry Reid, liberal media corporations like the New York Times, and labor unions have joined together to support restrictions on speech and liberty.



Their proposals for “reform” have fallen flat, in large part because they have been exposed as efforts to chill the Freedom of Speech. These attacks on the First Amendment have used populist rhetoric in an attempt to silence corporate speech. These efforts to silence corporations are difficult to reconcile when one sees that the New York Times, a media corporation, published a new proposal for “reform” authored by the founder of a non-profit corporation, aimed at silencing speakers that do not support their liberal world view.

In the April 4, 2011 edition of the [New York Times](#), David Callahan launched an ideological attack on the boogymen de jour, Charles and David Koch. Callahan sets the tone of his article by attacking the Koch brothers for “conceal[ing] the recipients of their largess.” In order to prevent this from occurring, Callahan would “require all nonprofit organizations that engage in political advocacy to reveal their donors.”



While Mr. Callahan alleges the current system can be utilized by the left and the right, he seems particularly offended by David Koch's support of "ideologically driven organizations like the Cato Institute." Callahan argues that such groups should be treated differently from other not-for-profit organizations.

His proposal, couched in terms of "fairness" is nothing more than an attempt to limit speech.

"In response, the Internal Revenue Service should create a new category for nonprofits engaged in policy advocacy. Such groups would have to disclose all their donors, while traditional 501(c)3's — museums and universities, for example — could continue to receive anonymous gifts.

"The I.R.S. should also set a ceiling on the deductibility of such gifts to limit the extent to which all taxpayers subsidize de facto political giving by the wealthy. The treatment of small gifts would remain unchanged to encourage ordinary Americans to engage in civic life.

Mr. Callahan founded Demos, A Network for Ideas and Action. Demos reports to the I.R.S. that it is a "non-partisan public policy research and advocacy organization in pursuit of a more equitable economy, a vibrant & inclusive democracy, an empowered public sector & a responsible U.S. engagement in the world." Demos engages in this "research and advocacy" while enjoying the benefits of its 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status.

When we look at the actual work carried out by Demos we find a hodgepodge of policy advocacy in such "non-partisan" issue areas as distribution of wealth and income, economic challenges of young people, felon disenfranchisement, inequality, poverty, and a program devoted to "race & debt."

Were a conservative organization to address these issues, Mr. Callahan would be offended. As he has proposed he would require them to disclose their donors and create disincentives to fund such an organization. But like many liberals, Mr. Callahan's true purpose seems to be "free speech for me, but not for thee." From Senator Chuck Schumer's misleadingly named DISCLOSE Act, to aggressive anti-speech advocacy by so-called "non-partisan" groups as Public Citizen, the Campaign Legal Center, and Common Cause, the mission of these "reformers" is clear — they only want to protect speech that they agree with.

Callahan's proposal is a thinly veiled attempt to chill the Freedom of Speech and silence conservative viewpoints. If he were proceeding in good faith, he would call on Demos to voluntarily disclose its donors. After all, Callahan and Demos are engaged in policy advocacy, which in his view deserves less protection than museums and the arts.