

At long last, Buddy Roemer draws a crowd for reform message

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Jonathan Tilove, The Times-Picayune

WASHINGTON - Too late to help propel his now castoff presidential ambitions, **Buddy Roemer**, or at any rate the issue of campaign finance reform he has championed, is finally drawing a crowd. At the end of a two-hour hearing Tuesday before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights entitled, "Taking Back Our Democracy: Responding to Citizens United and the Rise of Super PACs," Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill, who chaired the hearing, noted that 400 people had packed the hearing room and a nearby overflow room. It was a crowd that occasionally made its reformist sentiments known at a hearing that was, with the exception of Roemer and Ilya Shapiro, a senior fellow at the libertarian **Cato Institute**, an entirely Democratic affair.

No Republican members of the Senate attended the hearing, not even Sen. Lindsay Graham, R-S.C., who had asked that Shapiro appear to deliver a contrary point of view. Roemer entered Congress as a Democrat with Durbin 31 years ago, but, while serving as governor of Louisiana switched parties in 1991. Last year, Roemer ran for the Republican presidential nomination, and then this year launched an independent run for president. In both incarnations he ran as an apostle of reforms intended to remove the corrupting influence of money on politics. Those campaigns now behind him, Roemer has founded **The Reform Project**, with the same mission.

Roemer and Shapiro were joined on their panel by Harvard Law School professor Lawrence Lessig, who has become Roemer's comrade-in-arms on the reform mission.

Some of the discussion revolved around the possibility of working toward the long and arduous task of amending the Constitution to overcome the Citizens United decision. Citizens United opened the door for super PACs, which can raise and spend unlimited sums, albeit "independent" of particular candidate campaigns, even if that independence often seems more a matter of artifice than substance.

In the meantime, Roemer is calling for such statutory changes as requiring full and swift disclosure of contributions, a ban on lobbyist contributions and limiting PAC contributions so the committees cannot give more to any candidate than an individual can give.

Roemer said that after the hearing Durbin expressed interest in crafting legislation that might embody some of his ideas, and Roemer said he plans to call out Republicans for sacrificing their one-time zeal for disclosure on the altar of big money.