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Schumer bill would shed more light on campaign donors

By The Post-Standard Editorial Board

May 02, 2010, 5:01AM

When the U.S. Supreme Court last January allowed unlimited special-interest political contributions, it also reaffirmed the right to require disclosure. On Thursday, Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., helped introduce a measure to strengthen disclosure rules before the midterm elections this fall. "Our bill will follow the money," Schumer said. Without it, he said, special interests not only will influence elections, but mask donors' identities.

The DISCLOSE Act — "Democracy Is Strengthened by Casting Light On Spending in Elections" — says the head of donor groups must appear in the video to "stand by their ads," just as candidates do in their spots. Other top funders would make a disclaimer, and the top five donors would be listed on-screen. Disclosure reports would be filed well before Election Day.

John Samples of the conservative Cato Institute calls DISCLOSE a "cynical partisan play" by Democrats who fear big losses in November. He argues that current rules suffice and that Democrats would chill free speech by adding costs and exposing donors to "retribution."

But most corporations aren't short of funds. A bit more disclosure is a small price to pay for the privilege of contributing. As for fear of retribution, corporate or citizen donors unwilling to stand by their convictions tarnish their own integrity and the political process.

With the DISCLOSE Act, political contributions move further into the light. Without it, the increasing influence of special interests remains in the shadows.

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