

SENATOR SAM ERVIN SAYS



The revelations of the Watergate affair have raised serious questions concerning the manner in which we finance political campaigns for Federal office. A recent Gallup poll shows that nearly three out of four Americans are unsatisfied with the way the Nation is being governed.

Many people have expressed to me their loss of faith in our Government. Many urge reform of the process by which

political campaigns are conducted. The Senate chose the debt ceiling bill to focus new attention on this problem by the adoption of an amendment to provide public financing of Federal election campaigns. I voted against this amendment which may come as a shock to some. I did so because I do believe we ought to force taxpayers to finance political campaigns, and particularly those candidates they oppose. That is exactly what the amendment would do.

It is important to note that the senate on July 30 of this year passed S. 372, the Federal Election Campaign Act Amendments. I voted for that bill which is now in the House. During the Senate deliberations

on that bill, the so-called public financing amendment was defeated by a large margin. S. 372 was hailed as an outstanding step in the matter of regulating political campaigns, and their receipts and expenditures.

The amendment offered on the Senate floor on November 27 had received only thirty minutes consideration, I am told, in the Senate Finance Committee which rejected it as a part of the debt limit bill. Moreover, the amendment came to the floor without any recommendation by the Senate Rules Committee, whose Subcommittee on Privileges and Elections has completed hearings on S. 1103, S. 1954, and S. 2417, bills which provide for public financing of election campaigns.

In view of this peculiar legislative history and also because the House has a rule which declares that the House upon objection will not consider non-germane Senate amendments to a House-passed bill, I believe that the Senate action in adopting the public financing amendment was an exercise in futility.

Apart from the procedural aspects of the matter, I am concerned about the nation embarking on a major subsidy program for political candidates without knowing what we are doing or where we are going. Any good legislation reforming our election campaign processes needs to be well thought out and studied thoroughly by the American people. What we seek is to improve the processes by which officeholders are selected.

No one can deny that campaigns as they are now conducted are a mixture of good and bad functions. I am unconvinced that the amendment as offered and adopted by the Senate represents any improvement. Indeed, I think it will raise more problems than solutions because it is a curious mixture of public and private financing. Its ramifications are little understood by either the Congress or the public. Clearly the principal beneficiaries are Federal officeholders and those who can get up substantial amounts of money in their own.

Frankly, I do not like the idea of some Federal agency paying Federal campaign expenses. It seems to me that this opens the door for those in office to feather their own nests. I prefer a system which allows each citizen to make a tax deductible contribution up to a reasonable amount. We should also reform

any laws that need be to insure that the system works.

What is needed is a continuing study of the entire problem and

how we can make government truly representative. The answer it seems to me, will take more than a "patchwork" approach.



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