



Aletha Brooks <alethabrooks@sbcglobal.net> on 04/09/2004 05:46:36 PM

To: politicalcommitteestatus@fec.gov
cc:

Subject: RE: public comments regarding proposed rule changes threatening non-profit advocacy



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April 9, 2004

To: Ms. Mai T. Dinh
Acting Assistant General Counsel

From: Aletha Brooks
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Dear Ms. Dinh,

I thank you for accepting public comments regarding the proposed rule changes threatening non-profit advocacy. I want to express my grave concern about the significance and timing of this proposal. If I'm not mistaken, the FEC members are appointed by the President, and serve at his pleasure. The FEC should not change the rules for non-profit advocacy in the middle of an election year, especially in ways that Congress (the direct representatives of the people) already considered and rejected. Implementing these changes now would go far beyond what the Congress decided and the Supreme Court upheld. The chilling effect of the proposed rules on free speech cannot be overstated. Merely expressing an opinion about an officeholder's policies could turn a nonprofit group OVERNIGHT into a federally regulated political committee with crippling fund-raising restrictions. These changes would impoverish political debate and could act as a de facto "gag rule" on public policy advocacy. They would insulate public officials from substantive criticism for their positions on policy issues. They would actually diminish civic participation in government rather than strengthen it. This would be exactly the opposite result intended by most supporters of campaign finance reform. The FEC's proposed rule changes would dramatically impair vigorous debate about important national issues. It would hurt nonprofit groups across the political spectrum and restrict First Amendment freedoms in ways that are unhealthy for our democracy. Any kind of nonprofit – conservative, liberal, labor, religious, secular, social service, charitable, educational, civic participation, issue-oriented, large and small – could be affected by these rules. A vast number would be essentially silenced on the issues that define them, whether they are organized as 501 (c3), 501 (c4), or 527 organizations. Already, more than five hundred nonprofit organizations, including many that supported McCain-Feingold have voiced their opposition to the FEC's efforts to restrict advocacy in the name of campaign finance reform. I thank you for your time and I hope my concerns will be taken into serious consideration.

Respectfully,
Aletha Brooks