

Statement on Signing the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 *March 27, 2002*

Today I have signed into law H.R. 2356, the “Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002.” I believe that this legislation, although far from perfect, will improve the current financing system for Federal campaigns.

The bill reforms our system of financing campaigns in several important ways. First, it will prevent unions and corporations from making unregulated, “soft” money contributions—a legislative step for which I repeatedly have called. Often, these groups take political action without the consent of their members or shareholders, so that the influence of these groups on elections does not necessarily comport with the actual views of the individuals who comprise these organizations. This prohibition will help to right that imbalance. Second, this law will raise the decades-old limits on giving imposed on individuals who wish to support the candidate of their choice, thereby advancing my stated principle that election reform should strengthen the role of individual citizens in the political process. Third, this legislation creates new disclosure requirements and compels speedier compliance with existing ones, which will promote the free and swift flow of information to the public regarding the activities of groups and individuals in the political process. I long have believed that complete and immediate disclosure of the source of campaign contributions is the best way to reform campaign finance.

These provisions of the bill will go a long way toward fixing some of the most pressing problems in campaign finance today. They will result in an election finance system that encourages greater individual participation, and provides the public more accurate and timely information, than does the present system. All of the American electorate will benefit from these measures to strengthen our democracy.

However, the bill does have flaws. Certain provisions present serious constitutional concerns. In particular, H.R. 2356 goes farther than I originally proposed by preventing all individuals, not just unions and corporations, from making donations to political parties in connection with Federal elections. I believe individual freedom to participate in elections should be expanded, not diminished; and when individual freedoms are restricted, questions arise under the First Amendment. I also have reservations about the constitutionality of the broad ban on issue advertising, which restrains the speech of a wide variety of groups on issues of public import in the months closest to an election. I expect that the courts will resolve these legitimate legal questions as appropriate under the law.

As a policy matter, I would have preferred a bill that included a provision to protect union members and shareholders from involuntary political activities undertaken by their leadership. Individuals have a right not to have their money spent in support of candidates or causes with which they disagree, and those rights should be better protected by law. I hope that in the future the Congress and I can work together to remedy this defect of the current financing structure.

This legislation is the culmination of more than 6 years of debate among a vast array of legislators, citizens, and groups. Accordingly, it does not represent the full ideals of any one point of view. But it does represent progress in this often-contentious area of public policy debate. Taken as a whole, this bill improves the current system of financing for Federal campaigns, and therefore I have signed it into law.

GEORGE W. BUSH

The White House,
March 27, 2002.

NOTE: H.R. 2356, approved March 27, was assigned Public Law No. 107-155.

Remarks to First-Responders in Greenville March 27, 2002

Thank you very much. It is great to be back in South Carolina. I didn't realize I was going to be giving an address on my old jogging path. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Mayor, I have fond memories of your beautiful city. And thank you very much for your leadership and your hospitality, and thank you all for coming.

One of the things that I'm not surprised about was how the good folks of South Carolina responded on September the 11th, in the aftermath. The good people here hurt for the people of New York, because they realized an attack on one part of America was an attack on all of America. And I want to thank you all for donating a brand new firetruck to New York City. I want to thank you for sending men and women to New York City in response to the emergency. I know that firefighters and casualty experts, emergency management director headed up north to provide help, and I'm here to thank you for that. And I'm here also to thank you for what you do every single day.

You know, the evil ones hit us, but out of that evil has come some good. I'm going to talk to you about some of that good. And one of the good things that's come is a sincere appreciation and respect for the men and women who wear the uniform, the police and the fire and the emergency medical units all across the country. And I'm here to thank you as well for your dedication and your service to the people of your communities here in South Carolina.

I appreciate so very much Tom Ridge's service. You know, he was a Governor there in Pennsylvania, just kind of cruising along.

Life was pretty good. And then the President called him and said, "I've got an assignment for you, to come and set a national strategy for our homeland security. The enemy's hit us, and we'd better be ready in case the enemy hits us again. And we need a strategy." And I'm telling you, he's come to Washington, DC, with a vision and a capacity. And we're developing and have got a strategy, some of which I will share with you today. And Tom, I want to thank you for your service.

And I want to thank the other fellow on the stage here, Jim DeMint. He is a strong Congressman. He cares deeply about the people of this State. He is—he is an ally of mine in the House, because he is a man of integrity. He cares deeply about national issues and issues that affect the people here in his district. He understands the need for us to be tough and diligent and forceful when it comes to fighting terrorists. He understands the need for us to be strong at home as well. And that's why he has led a discussion on a strategy to make sure that the textile industry here in South Carolina gets not only the attention of the administration but a strategy to help people who work in the textile industry. This man is a leader, and he needs to go back to Washington, DC.

And we've got some other people from the fine South Carolina delegation. Lindsey Graham is here, and a little later on, I'm going to try to give Lindsey a little boost. And I appreciate Hank Brown for being here as well. Thank you for coming.

And I want to thank members of the statehouse who have come. You've got a