

All the News That's (Not) Fit to Print

Fact and Fiction about the Media Coverage of the Defeat of the Rule for Campaign Finance Reform

Media Fiction: The Republican leadership threw a last-minute obstacle at Rep. Shays and Rep. Meehan by requiring that their additions to their own bill be broken up into a dozen separate amendments.

Fact: The night before the rule was to be set, after the House had adjourned for the evening, Rep. Shays and Rep. Meehan threw 14 last-minute changes at the Rules Committee. Changes this numerous, this substantive, and this late in the process are VERY rare.

Media Fiction: The Shays-Meehan last-minute changes were only minor, non-substantive changes.

Fact: The changes were in no way minor. In actuality, *most* of the changes were substantive. For example, Shays-Meehan as reported would have required state and local parties to spend hard money in a 50-50 ratio with the soft money they'd be allowed to raise and spend for voter ID, get-out-the-vote efforts, and "generic activity." But one of the last-minute changes would have struck this hard-money requirement, making the soft-money loophole in the bill even wider!

Another example: Shays-Meehan as reported would have limited aggregate individual contributions to candidates to \$75,000 per two-year election cycle. But one of the last-minute changes would have slashed this limit to \$37,500 per two-year election cycle (sharply lower than current law).

The last-minute changes would have also struck sections of their own bill defining third-party expenditures arranged by a candidate as contributions to that candidate, prohibiting joint candidate-party fundraising committees, and requiring regulations be created to prevent efforts to evade campaign law.

How could these *possibly* be minor, non-substantive changes?

Media Fiction: The last-minute changes were submitted to make the Shays-Meehan bill conform to the campaign reform legislation that the Senate had already passed.

Fact: This assertion is inaccurate. The Senate bill (Feingold-McCain) passed in early *April*. Rep. Shays and Rep. Meehan have had three months to conform their legislation to the Senate version. Shays-Meehan as reported had already closely mirrored the Senate version. In actuality, many of the last-minute changes would have made Shays-Meehan **LESS** like the Senate version. The changes were aimed solely at winning back some wavering Democrats who were going to vote against Shays-Meehan.

Media Fiction: The whole rules process was totally unfair.

Fact: The Committee on House Administration reported Shays-Meehan **unfavorably**. How many bills reported unfavorably go on to become the base legislation for the consideration of a major political issue?

Rep. Shays and Rep. Meehan submitted 14 mostly substantive changes to their own bill at the last minute, and **all** of them were made in order under the rule.

The fact is that the process was more than fair, and the fledgling Shays-Meehan coalition in concert with partisan Democrats prevented the House from considering any bill on the important issue of campaign finance reform.
