



The Fallacy of Campaign Finance Reform

John Samples

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At first glance, campaign finance reform looks like a good idea. McCain-Feingold, for instance, regulates campaigns by prohibiting national political parties from accepting soft money contributions from corporations, labor unions, and wealthy individuals. But are such measures, or any of the numerous and similarly restrictive proposals that have circulated through Washington in recent years, really good for our democracy?

John Samples says no, and here he takes a penetrating look into the premises and consequences of the long crusade against big money in politics. How many Americans, he asks, know that there is little to no evidence that campaign contributions really influence members of Congress? Or that so-called negative political advertising actually improves the democratic process by increasing voter turnout and knowledge? Or that limits on campaign contributions make it harder to run for office, thereby protecting incumbent representatives from losing their seats of power?

Posing tough questions such as these, Samples uncovers numerous fallacies beneath proposals for campaign finance reform. He argues that our most common concerns about money in politics are misplaced because the ideals implicit in our notion of corruption are incoherent or indefensible. The chance to regulate money in politics allows representatives to serve their own interests at a cost to their constituents. And, ironically, this long crusade against the corruption caused by campaign contributions allows public officials to reduce their vulnerability by suppressing electoral competition.

Defying long-held assumptions and conventional political wisdom, *The Fallacy of Campaign Finance Reform* is a provocative and decidedly nonpartisan work that will be essential for anyone concerned about the future of American government.

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