

Washington, D.C. - Reps. David Price (D-NC) and Mike Castle (R-DE) will introduce legislation today to close a loophole in campaign finance law that allows political candidates and campaign committees to skirt responsibility for ads conveyed online. Their bill, the Responsible Campaign Communications Act of 2007, would also seek to curb the deceptive use of prerecorded telephone calls, or "robo-calls."

Candidates and political committees are turning increasingly to the Internet and email to distribute campaign messages, including audio and video ads that would be subject to "Stand by Your Ad" requirements if distributed through radio or TV. "Stand by Your Ad" – more commonly known as the "I approved this message!" tagline – has been credited by many political observers with giving voters a greater understanding of the advertising they see on television and for encouraging more responsible ads. Price introduced the original "Stand by Your Ad" legislation that was included in the 2002 Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA), and Price and Castle joined forces to file an amicus brief in defense of the provision when the Supreme Court considered a challenge to BCRA in 2003.

The bill being introduced today would ensure that candidates continue to "stand by" their ads in the Internet age by extending the existing requirements for radio and television ads to those conveyed online or via e-mail. The bill would apply only to those who are currently subject to "Stand by Your Ad" rules, and it would not infringe upon online free speech as protected by a Federal Election Commission (FEC) ruling issued last year.

The new legislation would also promote accountability in the use of political "robo-calls." The 2006 elections saw a proliferation of calls designed to give the impression that they were coming from a candidate's opponent, often placed repeatedly and at inconvenient hours, in an attempt to discourage potential voters from supporting the opponent. The Price-Castle bill would put an end to this sort of deception by requiring up-front identification of the call's sponsor.

"When we first instituted the 'Stand By Your Ad' requirements, our hope was to deter candidates from the harsh attacks that have become all too common in today's political environment," Price said. "The means to communicate a political message are constantly evolving, and political operatives are finding new and creative ways to undermine our best efforts to change the tone of public debate. If we are going to uphold the spirit as well as the letter of Stand by Your Ad, we need to update the law."

"Like it or not, with the advent of increasingly sophisticated technology, voters are being targeted through communications means that we may not even have thought of five years ago. That is why it is critical that all types of electioneering communication are transparent -- voters deserve to know who is behind these advertisements. This legislation will apply the 'I approved this message' tagline to all election ads," Castle said.

The Price-Castle legislation is supported by the non-partisan campaign watchdog groups Democracy 21 and the Campaign Legal Center. Fred Wertheimer, founder and President of Democracy 21, said, "It is simple and unassailable logic that the same campaign finance rules should apply to a campaign ad placed on the Internet by a candidate that apply to the same campaign ad run by the candidate on television or radio...The Price-Castle legislation would [also] help ensure that robo-callers take responsibility for making sure that voters know who is behind the robo-calls they receive. We congratulate Representatives Price and Castle for their important leadership on behalf of ensuring that voters are clearly informed about who is responsible for the campaign communications they receive."

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