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EDITORIAL

Call the Fat Cats Forth

With little time to spare, Capitol lawmakers gathered outside the Supreme Court Thursday to propose an antidote to the court's damaging decision to open elections to unlimited attack and advocacy ads financed from the shadows by special-interest money.

Senator Charles Schumer, Democrat of New York, and Representative Chris Van Hollen, Democrat of Maryland, are calling for new legislation that would let the voters know which financiers are stalking or plumping for which federal candidates.

The United States Chamber of Commerce immediately, predictably, warned that the new disclosure rules would "silence constitutionally protected speech." Actually, the measure applies sunshine, not silence, to secretive, end-run campaign spending.

Just as Frank Perdue used to proudly back his chickens, the proposed legislation requires the chief donors in corporate, union and shell organization ads to stand by their message before the cameras. It's healthy and candid. And to make informed choices, the voters certainly need to know.

It also requires corporations and unions to promptly disclose how much they are spending on these ads. Other provisions would alert shareholders and union members to what the leaders are up to; restrict foreign interests from investing to sway voters; and bar political spending by major government contractors or beneficiaries of federal bailout money that is not repaid.

Republican leaders tried to dismiss the legislation as a shield for incumbent Democrats. Polls show the public overwhelmingly opposed to the Supreme Court ruling. Candidates in both parties should view it as protection from being sandbagged by big-money attacks from right or left. President Obama was right when he described passage as critical to "restoring our government to its rightful owners: the American people."

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