

Dr. Dobson and Free Speech: Does God Need a Lobbyist?

by:
Stan Moody
[Christian Policy Institute](#)

January 11, 2007

US Senate Bill S.1, scheduled to reach the Senate floor next week, has Dr. Dobson of *Focus on the Family* up in arms.

Using phrases like “urgent matter,” “public muzzling” and “silencing the opposition,” Dr. Dobson broke in by telephone to his regularly-scheduled January 10th radio broadcast to rally millions of his listeners and supporters in a grassroots lobbying effort against the bill.

The essence of his concern is that the Democratic majority, with complicity on the part of moderate Republicans (including Sen. Susan Collins, R-ME), is conspiring to insulate itself from the public by requiring more stringent reporting of spending to influence legislation.

An examination of the provisions of S.1 had me wondering why an organization purporting to be advocating for openness in government would object to openness in the means by which it itself influences government.

More disturbing was the incendiary nature of Dr. Dobson's appeal, omitting the details of the bill so as to inflame latent passion from the “They're coming to get us” faction of his audience. Failure to include the facts suggests that not only is his constituency in eager pursuit of a cause but that truth need not be an impediment to action: “Don't disturb me with the facts!”

This is a curious strategy for one who claims to “know the truth” and by it has been set free.

Specifically, S.1 tightens the financial reporting requirements for lobbying from semi-annual to quarterly. It raises fines for “knowing violation” of reporting rules from

\$50,000 to \$100,000 per instance, variable depending on the severity of the fraudulent reporting.

In listening to Dr. Dobson's report, he objects to such fines on the grounds that listeners could be deprived of his voice, leading one to conclude that a lower penalty for fraud, or no penalty at all, would be more equitable.

Although he did not elaborate, it is likely that his objection to the bill centers on a provision that reaches beyond the direct influence of public officials to the stimulation of grassroots lobbying of the kind displayed in his radio broadcast of January 10.

If passed, organizations would be required to disclose what it costs them to stimulate a person or entity that spends more than \$25,000 per quarter to influence government action. In other words, if *Focus on the Family* were to spend money to encourage the Church of What's Happening Now to spend \$25,000 or more a quarter on lobbying, they would have to report that expenditure.

That provision is so obscure that support in Congress is said to be fading into the woodwork.

That would impose an impossible burden on institutions and individuals to monitor the spending of affiliate organizations so as to trigger reporting requirements. Dr. Dobson is right to oppose such a provision but is wrong in encouraging millions to write to their representatives to kill the entire bill.

To oppose the bill on the grounds of the squelching of free speech is disingenuous at best. Any non-profit or for-profit organization owes a reasonable obligation to the public to inform it not only of its campaign contributions but of its expenditures to influence legislation.

To require this is no restriction on free speech. It provides valuable information on the morphing of free speech into influence-peddling.

Non-profits with no lobbying standing have abused their tax-free privileges for years by actively supporting political candidates and parties and participating in signature gathering for referendum questions. Forgotten is that taxpayers are collectively chipping in to pay property taxes on prime real estate that houses belief systems or activities that they may not share.

Expect legislation to surface in the near future to require reporting of such activities or enforcement of restrictions against such activities.

All of which brings us to the interesting question as to whether or not God needs a lobbyist. The nature of the God of Israel being Truth and Light, at the very least it can be said that God does not need a lobbyist who inflames public opinion with half-truths and innuendo.

Dr. Stan Moody, an evangelical Baptist minister and founder of the Christian Policy Institute, relinquished his Republican Party membership in his first term in the Maine House of Representatives. Dr. Moody is the author of several provocative books, including, *Crisis in Evangelical Scholarship* and [*McChurched: 300 Million Served and Still Hungry*](#). Pastor of a rural country church in Central Maine, Moody has enjoyed a long and productive career in small business development and management.