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Campaign Spending

By Jerry H. Goldfeder

To the Editor: Re “[Companies: Show Us the Money](#),” by Thomas P. DiNapoli and Bill de Blasio (Op-Ed, March 21):

The proposal before the Securities and Exchange Commission to compel corporations to disclose their campaign spending would undoubtedly aid the public in making informed decisions about candidates’ supporters. For 40 years, the United States Supreme Court has affirmed the constitutionality and importance of disclosure — and did so again, ironically, in [Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission](#), the 2010 ruling that helped unleash 2012’s \$6 billion election.

The lack of transparency is not the only problem, however. The last election was awash in money mainly because a rash of newly created nonprofit social welfare organizations saturated the airwaves in support of candidates. Such groups, regulated by the Internal Revenue Service, are permitted to do so provided that political activity is not their primary purpose.

But many of these pop-ups, on both sides of the aisle, appeared to be wholly political, with no trace of the normally required charitable purpose. If this perception is accurate, the I.R.S. should yank their tax-exempt status and penalize their principals for fraud.

In a welcome development, the I.R.S. announced last week that it has sent questionnaires to some 1,300 of these groups to check their bona fides and to ascertain the extent of their campaign activities. Let’s see what we learn.

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