

**Comments before the Senate Committee on Ethics and Elections**

**Dr. Mark Peterson**

**February 1, 2012**

**In Regards to: Senate Bill 309**

**Comments before the Senate Committee on Ethics and Elections by Dr. Mark Peterson, February 1, 2012:**

Members of the Committee, Chairwoman Huntington, thank-you for keeping your foot in the door long enough for me to be here this morning.

SB 309 proposing amendments requiring sponsorship disclosure for broadcast campaign messages is good public policy. As advocates of full-disclosure have said on many occasions in the past, "Sunshine is the best disinfectant." While the *Citizens United* case, recently decided by the U.S. Supreme Court, may have been a reaffirmation of the sanctity of unimpeded free speech, there can be little doubt that the impact of unlimited money in our political campaign system has had a corrosive effect on the public's attitude towards campaigns and candidates. When these virtually unlimited funds can be used to support any point of view from the reasonable to the outlandish, and from objectively factual to scabrously false, this bill offers the opportunity to at least put some bright light on who's calling who's pot blacker. With time the public will learn that those who put their identities to their broadcast statements are at least more honest than those who find some ruse or obfuscation for avoiding disclosure.

As a social scientist I've long been an advocate of the open give and take of public discourse, and even the most uninformed opinions can sometimes at least provide amusement. But, it has always concerned me that people who get to cloak their views in anonymity often take full advantage of that privilege to say the least responsible and most dishonest things. I sympathize with those who fear that openly identified speech is

speech that may invite retribution, but I think in political campaigning, disclosure and identity are essential requirements for both honest debate and fair outcomes.

I've read that some think that this is just a "feel good" measure that addresses a non-existent problem; that Kansans are unaware or unmoved by the lack of these disclosures; and that given the price of campaign advertising, the stolen seconds required at the end of a campaign commercial for this disclosure represents an unwarranted cost and intrusion. What I've also read is that focus groups and polling indicate that voters take note of who "owns up" to their message, and are able to discern the importance of the "I'm candidate's name, and I approve of this advertisement" tagline. And frankly, given the production professionalism in today's campaigns, it is really a subpar candidate that cannot take this lemon and turn it into lemonade. As for the problem being non-existent, I would point out that for many of us with eyes as old as the rest of our bodies, reading the small print script tacked on the bottom of the screen for these ads, as the law currently requires, is nearly impossible if we don't have our reading glasses on at that moment. And finally, I'm sure some of you must have seen or have been told about the moment during a recent presidential debate when Wolf Blitzer asked Governor Romney about an ad. His response was, "I don't think that was one of ours." Because of federal "Stand By Your Ad" requirements Mr. Blitzer was able to quickly reply that CNN staff had just replayed the add and clearly heard the Governor declaring his identity and affirming his approval of the ad and its contents thereby proving what may be the new adage of a more open politics, "If you're going to run, you won't be able to hide."

So, I urge you to support SB309 and recommend it "do pass" to the whole body.