



Subject line: Campaign backers should be disclosed on the internet

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## **Groups Urge FEC to Address Growing Problem of Campaign Ads on the Internet from Disguised Sponsors**

### ***Rulemaking Could Help Curtail Foreign Meddling in Elections***

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Federal Election Commission (FEC) must develop disclaimer requirements for political ads on the internet, Public Citizen and Free Speech For People said today.

The groups joined thousands of citizens in submitting comments to the FEC urging the agency to move forward with the rulemaking.

The disclaimers would let the public know who is paying for the campaign ads. Disclaimers are notices placed in the ads themselves informing the public who has paid for the ads. As such, disclaimers constitute one form of disclosure requirements.

Currently internet communications are largely exempt from campaign finance disclosure requirements, allowing ad sponsors to disguise their identities and even offer their campaign ads as misleading news stories.

“Americans have had enough of Russian-sponsored ‘fake news’ manipulating our elections illegally,” said Craig Holman, government affairs lobbyist for Public Citizen’s Congress Watch division. “Without adequate disclosure requirements of who is paying for campaign ads on the internet, we are letting social media become the playground for secretive political operatives, including foreign nationals.”

The last time the FEC tried to deal with disclosure of internet campaign ads at all was more than a decade ago, in 2006. The internet and social media platforms have undergone revolutionary changes since then, and the internet now plays a critical role in the political environment.

“Over the past decade, internet political advertising has evolved to become both more sophisticated and, as the 2016 election showed, more deceptive,” said Ron Fein, legal director of Free Speech For People. “The FEC is stuck in the past when it comes to making advertisers tell voters who’s behind these ads. The FEC needs to update its transparency protections so voters know who’s paying for internet political advertising.”

According to a [recent Marist poll](#), more than three in four Americans want full disclosure of the funding sources behind social media campaign ads – Democrats, Republicans and Independents alike. Transparency of the sponsors of campaign ads, even on the internet, is not a partisan issue.

“We fully expect thousands of Americans across the nation will call on the FEC to move ahead with rulemaking requiring disclosure of the funders behind internet campaign ads,” said Jonah Minkoff-Zern, campaign co-director of Public Citizen’s Democracy Is For People. “Comments in support of the rulemaking will continue pouring in until the Nov. 9 deadline for the agency’s comment period.”

The comments from Public Citizen and Free Speech For People can be viewed [here](#).