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Campaign finance law fought by 'odd bedfellows'

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Byline: By Frank J. Murray, THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Opponents of the campaign reform act believe comparisons with pornography are the best way to muster public support for killing the new law in the courts.

"Pornography has greater protection in this country than political speech," former Sen. Malcolm Wallop, now chairman of Frontiers of Freedom, said of a Supreme Court ruling allowing sexual displays with computerized images of children.

Today is the deadline to join an extraordinary fast-track process that will determine the constitutionality of the election law enacted March 27. A special three-judge federal panel will hear the case, after which it can be appealed directly to the Supreme Court.

"What the virtual pornography decision does show is the strength of the First Amendment," said former independent counsel Kenneth W. Starr.

Mr. Starr shares with his ideological opposite, New York lawyer Floyd Abrams, the role of lead counsel in a lawsuit that makes allies of groups that normally fight intensely over issues related to gun control, abortion rights and the place of religion in society.

"Virtual pornography of children is protected, while on the other hand the American Civil Liberties Union is committing a crime when it runs a radio ad

[just before an election] urging House Speaker Dennis Hastert to move a certain bill through the House of Representatives," Mr. Starr said.

The ACLU called the amalgam of groups opposing the campaign finance law "an odd bedfellows coalition of public policy advocacy."

Mr. Starr said the cross-section of interests will help convey the message that it is ludicrous to protect pornography while banning political advocacy.

"Election-law restriction is not an issue that a whole lot of grass-roots folks get fired up over," said Jason F. Wright, vice president of Frontiers of Freedom, which hosted a National Press Club seminar on the question. "Maybe it shouldn't matter in court, but ... we certainly do wish that the general public would get in an uproar about this."

Among the new law's complex web of restrictions is a ban on broadcast "electioneering communications" by most organizations 60 days prior to federal elections or 30 days before primaries for federal officials.

"You have to wonder what the courts would do to a law saying pornographers could not publish anything for 60 days before Christmas," Mr. Wallop said.

"This is the first piece of campaign finance law I've ever read that has sentencing guidelines," said McLean lawyer William J. **Olson**, who filed one of seven lawsuits on behalf of Rep. Ron Paul, Texas Republican.