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## McCain demands early vote on campaign-finance reform

By Joseph Curl  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Sen. John McCain, who claims a "mandate" on campaign-finance reform despite his early defeat in the Republican presidential primaries, said yesterday he wants a Senate vote on his bill before April.

"We'd like to get the issue up before the end of March," said Mr. McCain.

Asked if he would make good on his threat to tie up other legislation if his timetable is not met, he said, "We will have to exercise our options."

Seeking to push the central issue of his failed candidacy to the top of President Bush's agenda, the Arizona Republican met with his former foe at the White House for an hour last night.

While both sides said the discussion covered substantial ground, neither said it bridged the wide gaps that separate them.

"The legislation as it is now configured will go through an amending process, and I'm sure there'll be some changes made," said Mr. McCain.

But Bush spokesman Ari Fleischer said the president has not changed his mind about allowing individuals to contribute whatever

## Bush hints room to bargain with Democrats on agenda

By Andrew Cain  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

President Bush, facing looming fights over school vouchers and the size of his tax cut, said yesterday that he hopes "frank discussion" will lead to breakthroughs with Democrats who disagree with his proposals.

Mr. Bush met with leading Democrats for the third straight day and hinted that there may be room to negotiate.

"That's part of what a dialogue is all about. I think that it's important for me to explain. It's

important for me to hear others' positions," Mr. Bush told reporters before he and congressional leaders from both parties conferred over breakfast pastries in the Cabinet Room.

"It's important for me to understand why there's resistance, and why. But it all happens with good, honest discussion, a frank discussion about positions."

The meeting came as Mr. Bush received more good news about his Cabinet appointees.

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they wish to political campaigns — a sticking point between the two men.

"The president continues to believe that individuals have a constitutionally protected right to give. . . I'm sure they're not in complete agreement" on that issue, said Mr.

Fleischer.

Mr. McCain's plan, approved twice in the House but killed each time in the Senate, would ban unregulated "soft money" — unrestricted cash that goes to parties

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Photo by Bert V. Goulati/The Washington Times

**Power pair:** Elaine Chao, Labor secretary nominee, is introduced on the Hill yesterday by her husband, Kentucky Sen. Mitch McConnell.

# McCain

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and cannot be used to directly benefit a candidate.

Soft money, much of which comes from corporations, labor unions and wealthy individuals, amounted to more than \$500 million in the 2000 election cycle.

Mr. Bush, on the other hand, wants to ban soft-money contributions from corporations and unions, but not from individuals.

The president also wants to include a provision — called “paycheck protection” — that lets union members prevent their dues from going to political campaigns against their wishes. Democrats, who rely heavily on money from labor unions, vehemently oppose the provision.

“We talked about the so-called ‘paycheck protection’ issue,” Mr. McCain said. “I talked about the fact that we should balance that . . .

Stockholders should give their agreement if they also have their money spent for political purposes.”

Still, both sides said the discussions went well and will continue.

“I come away with the distinct impression that he’s favorably dis-

posed towards continued discussions on this issue and seeing if we can’t work out something with the belief that both of us hold that this system needs to be fixed,” said Mr. McCain, who “suspended” his campaign after a crushing defeat on Super Tuesday and withheld his endorsement for Mr. Bush for months.

Said Mr. Fleischer: “Any time you can begin three days into your term and have a meeting with somebody who advocates something that’s important and something that many people think you’re far apart [on], and it becomes clearer and clearer you’re not so far apart, and both sides say it’s a good meeting, then the process is beginning on the right note.”

Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, who attended a White House meeting yesterday with Mr. Bush and congressional leaders from both parties, said he is convinced the president will take all proposals seriously.

“He certainly didn’t say, ‘I’m going to sign the McCain-Feingold bill,’ nor did he say, ‘I’m going to oppose the McCain-Feingold bill.’

What he did say was that . . . he had an open mind and was prepared to consider a lot of different legisla-

tive proposals having to do with campaign reform.”

Mr. Daschle predicted the bill would come up within several months.

Mr. McCain has wasted no time pushing his favorite issue. On Mr. Bush’s first working day at the White House, Mr. McCain held a press conference to tout his campaign-finance reform bill, co-sponsored by Sen. Russell D. Feingold, Wisconsin Democrat.

“After one of the closest elections in our nation’s history, there’s one thing the American people are unanimous about. They want their government back,” he said.

“The American people have chosen the president of the United States. But I also have a mandate, and I believe that that mandate can be achieved under moderate and reasonable circumstances,” said Mr. McCain, surrounded Monday by House and Senate members of both parties.

Mr. McCain said the Senate needs to act quickly “so we can achieve meaningful reform and restore the public’s faith in our government.”

Said Mr. Feingold: “This is not a challenge to our new president. All of us respect our new president and look forward to working with

him on many issues. This is an opportunity for cooperation and for real accomplishment with the new administration."

Some Republicans see Mr. McCain's move as an attempt to detract from the president's agenda, which Mr. Bush has pushed hard since his first day in office.

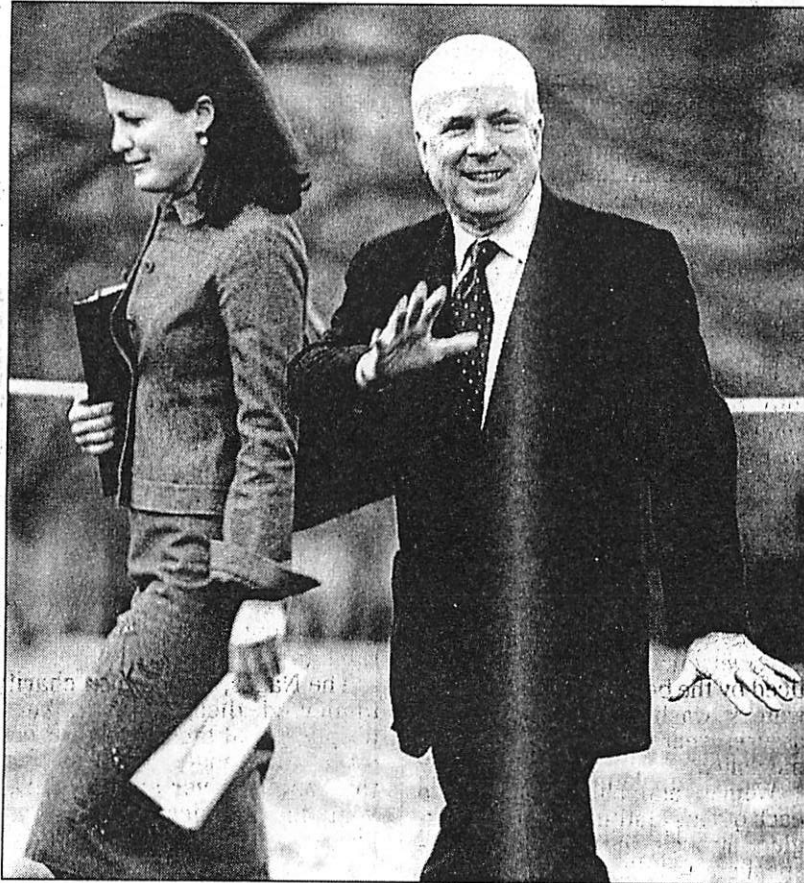
But others, like Sen. James M. Jeffords, a Vermont Republican who votes often with Democrats, said the legislation must move quickly.

Sen. Carl Levin, Michigan Democrat, said there is only a small "window of opportunity with the opening of the 107th Congress."

"Sens. McCain and Feingold ... can proceed to bring this to the floor without being accused in any way of disrupting the business of the Senate," he said.

Some Democrats claim Mr. Bush must address McCain-Feingold because of the slim margin in the election.

"The American people may not be sure about which party they want governing — it was a very close election. But they're sure about one thing; they're sure that both parties are up to their knees in soft money, and they want it to stop," said Rep. Martin T. Meehan, Massachusetts Democrat.



Sen. John McCain, with press secretary Nancy Ives, greets reporters at the White House before meeting President Bush.