

By CHRIS TEMPLE



Steel Tariffs

Shays-Meehan Campaign Reform Bill, and Our Expanding War on Terrorism

On March 5, following months of relentless pressure applied by what is left of the steel industry in the United States, President Bush announced that he will order the imposition of tariffs ranging from 8 to 30 percent on several types of imported steel. Unfortunately, it was a move dictated by political considerations rather than by sound economics or national security, both of which are far more important.

Steelmakers in America have been buckling under the weight of massive foreign imports, as monetary officials at both the Federal Reserve and the Treasury have consciously encouraged these imports as a means of helping to bail out tottering foreign economies. This dumping of steel in the U.S. has cost nearly 50,000 jobs, led to more than two dozen bankruptcies, and has put at risk health and retirement benefits for some 600,000 workers still fortunate enough to be employed by those players left in the industry.

Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney campaigned in 2000, in part, on promises to come to the aid of the beleaguered industry. Those promises helped the GOP ticket eke out a victory over the Democrats in West Virginia, and put Bush into office. Now, Bush hopes his actions – though they fall short of what the industry wanted – will help the GOP in the mid-term elections by diminishing this blue collar and union support for Democrat House and Senate candidates.

Rather than worrying solely about politics, the Bush administration would do well to come up with a longer-term strategy to save this vital industry. America's national security and military self-sufficiency have been put at risk by the crippling of this key manufacturing component of our economy and military. An administration that was quick (together with Congress) to prop up the

airlines after September 11 must do more. Instead, it has put a tiny political band-aid over a gaping wound. In addition, Bush's actions have likely started a trade war; the European Union was quick after the tariff announcement to promise a fight in the World Trade Organization over this "protectionism."

Nothing short of a reordering of our national security, manufacturing and trade priorities will do in the end.

Shays-Meehan

In one of the boldest attacks ever against free speech and the democratic process, the House of Representatives recently passed the Shays-Meehan "campaign reform" bill (HR 2356), after backers of this Trojan Horse of a bill succeeded in stifling some 13 amendments designed to defend free speech and the Constitution itself.

The bogey man predictably used as an excuse for this horrendous "reform" bill was Enron. Prior to the energy trading firm's collapse and its dirty laundry being aired, the opponents of the Senate's version passed last year (McCain-Feingold) had successfully held off this draconian bill in the House. Further, President Bush had indicated he was opposed to the bill – and appropriately so – due to its stifling effects on political debate and its clear unconstitutionality.

But Enron changed everything. And, with the media and many members of Congress decrying the ways in which the bankrupt company "bought" its way into politicians' and regulators' graces, a fresh excuse was at hand for the backers of so-called campaign finance reform to regain the political momentum. As we witnessed, they wasted no time.

Both Shays-Meehan and McCain-Feingold shred the First Amendment. Among other things, these bills make it

a federal crime to even mention the name of a candidate for office within 60 days of an election. Says Steve Dasbach, Executive Director of the national Libertarian Party, "This gag-the-opposition strategy isn't just unconstitutional; it's positively un-American."

Lost in the Enron debate and that company's enabling of Shays-Meehan to be rammed through the House is the *fact* that, for the most part, everyone knows how much money Enron (and other corporations) spend – and to whom these "soft money" contributions go. It's public information, as everyone has been able to read of late. If the voters decide this is a rotten deal, the solution is simple: vote out those who benefited from Enron's largesse. But that's too simple; instead, those wishing to further entrench incumbent politicians are using Enron as an excuse for their nefarious goals.

The bill now goes back to the Senate, where opponents are trying to muster a filibuster. Most expect it to fail, and expect President Bush to "reluctantly" sign the finished product.

Hopefully, when a legal challenge to this clearly unconstitutional legislation inevitably makes its way through the courts, it will be properly put out of its misery. Until then, make sure you know how your own House and Senate members voted. And keep in mind that, if they are so bent on protecting their lifetime jobs that they are willing to so blatantly "sabotage the competition and vandalize the Constitution," as Dasbach puts it, they need to go!

Our Expanding "War"

In the immediate aftermath of September 11, our entire nation was appropriately galvanized, and almost unanimously fell in behind the President's goals to find and neutralize those responsible.