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Democracy 21

Roll Call: Morning Business: New Blood

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By Matthew Murray

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President Barack Obama on Friday nominated union lawyer John Sullivan to a seat on the Federal Election Commission, a selection that has split the normally unified campaign finance reform community.

A campaign finance lawyer at Service Employees International Union, Sullivan would replace Democratic-nominated Commissioner Ellen Weintraub, who has continued to serve on the panel since her term expired more than two years ago.

A spokesman for the Senate Rules and Administration Committee said on Monday that the panel has not yet scheduled Sullivan's confirmation hearing.

A veteran labor and election lawyer who has also represented the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Sullivan has worked on both state and federal issues, including the 2000 presidential recount in Florida.

The reform community, which often reacts in lock step on campaign finance matters, appears to be divided on the nomination.

The Campaign Legal Center, whose management ranks include Trevor Potter — Sen. John McCain's (R-Ariz.) lawyer — former Common Cause executive Meredith McGehee and former Rep. Christopher Shays (R-Conn.), immediately bashed the White House pick on Friday; in particular, the group criticized Sullivan's opposition to portions of the 2002 Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act written by McCain, Shays and Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wis.).

"Mr. John Sullivan's only known statements on campaign finance issues have been made to the FEC on behalf of the union that employs him," Campaign Legal Center Executive Director J. Gerald Hebert said in a statement. "While lawyers are of course obligated to represent their clients, the gusto with which Mr. Sullivan has bashed important elements of McCain-Feingold and repeatedly taken radical deregulatory positions does not inspire confidence that he will have different views if confirmed to the Commission."

Meanwhile, Democracy 21 President Fred Wertheimer is taking a wait-and-see approach to Sullivan's nomination, and the pro-public-financing group Public Campaign applauded Sullivan for "his integral role in shaping the Service Employees International Union's endorsements of both state and federal public financing of elections."

"I'm not familiar with him and therefore don't have any position on him," Wertheimer said.

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