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Can We Get You Anything Else?
The feckless Federal Election Commission has done it again. It is supposed to enforce campaign finance laws and protect elections and voters from the worst money abuses. Instead, it has tailored another loophole in the ban on unlimited “soft money” politicking — allowing Congressional candidates unrestricted war chests to try to influence the redrawing of electoral maps.

Redistricting litigation battles should be seen as having no bearing “in connection with” the elections that follow, the commission ludicrously maintained, using language from the McCain-Feingold soft money ban to undermine it. The F.E.C. would have us believe giving a ballplayer the power to shape the playing field has absolutely no effect on the outcome of the game.

Redistricting battles are tooth-and-claw fights for survival for incumbents. Mapmaking is waged town by town and street by street as statehouse political machines reshape districts to protect powerful colleagues in Congress. Paul Ryan of the nonpartisan Campaign Legal Center correctly warns that fresh pots of easy money will only enhance the cynical maxim of redistricting that “members of Congress choose their voters,” not the other way around.

The F.E.C. was created to protect the public interest in elections. Time after time the interests of the major parties win out. The six-member commission — split between the parties — needs a majority for any enforcement action. In recent months, it has been paralyzed by partisan splits. Not on this chance to license soft money bonanzas for the redistricting battles that will follow the 2010 census. All six commissioners voted yea.

Once again, the F.E.C. tilted the playing field toward party insiders. Once again, it offered compelling evidence for why it must be replaced with a panel of truly independent experts committed to enforcing the law, not finding more ways around it.