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**-For Immediate Release-**

A massive money laundering scheme in political campaigns has been uncovered by the Gibson Group of Maryland and Election Watch, Inc. out of Wisconsin. Large sums of money have been placed with thousands of individuals across the United States. These individuals, called smurfs, then make numerous contributions to either liberal PACS, committees or sometimes directly to the candidates' campaigns. Smurfing is a term coined by drug gangs years ago to identify their money mules. Over \$200 million has been laundered and the group is still counting. "The more we look the more we find" said Peter Bernegger, President of Election Watch, Inc.. The two nonprofits teamed up to bring forth this evidence. They are finding the smurfs are not aware their names and addresses are being used for such voluminous donations. According to the Federal Election Commission, people who make political contributions donate on average 1.4 times per year. "We're finding smurfs who are making 1,000 to 6,000 donations per year – and every year for three upwards to seven years." said Bernegger. "We even found one who is making 40.8 donations per day, 365 days per year." Chris Gleason out of Florida found a good deal of the anomalies.

The two groups investigated smurfs and saw a profile emerging: primarily white, over the age of 65, retired, several are single, very liberal and of middle to lower economic class. "They are real people, not fake names" Bernegger commented. The team established a list of over thirty characteristics to identify smurfs. One is the use of multiple derivative spellings of names, also addresses.

Another term for smurfing is structuring, where the money is donated in small amounts typically between 1 cent upwards to \$100. The team found some liberal PACS across the country are bundling up the money from other smurfs. Some of that money is then contributed to liberal candidates' campaigns. Other sums are transferred to second liberal PACS or committees. Whereby the smurfs' names are being washed from the later transactions. If one looked at a particular liberal candidate's campaign donations, it would not show the bulk of the donations were coming from smurfs. A political campaign which received funds illegally is required per state and federal law to pay the money back, promptly.

The top ten smurfs in the state of Michigan made 125,122 contributions over the last seven years. In Arizona the top one made 18,672 contributions in just three years. Another one in Louisiana gave a sum worth much more than her house. The top 32 smurfs in Maryland gave a total of \$5,559,429.22 over the last five years. The majority of these are not rich people. When one smurf was contacted in Florida her husband hung up the phone while she was yelling at him in the background not to say anything. Then a few days later her donations completely stopped.

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