Connecting with Voters on Money in Politics

A Briefing Book for Federal Candidates

February 2018
Table of Contents

- Introduction ................................................................. 1
- Polling: Voters Care About Money in Politics ...................... 2
- Talking About Money in Politics ....................................... 3
- Responding to Critics ...................................................... 6
- Core Policy Solution: Empowering Small Donors ................. 8
- A Comprehensive Policy Platform ..................................... 9
- Add Money-in-Politics Questions to Your Research ............... 12
- Social Media Content ..................................................... 14
- Additional Materials ....................................................... 15
  - Examples of Op-Eds
  - Other Resources

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Introduction

Voters around the country believe our elections are too often dominated by big money from corporations, the wealthy, and special interests—and they are looking to hear from candidates like you about how to create a democracy that works for everyone.

People of all political stripes believe politicians are influenced by their dependency on wealthy donors and therefore don’t always act in the public interest. This perception, which is growing along with the rising cost of campaigns, is fueling cynicism and driving distrust of politicians and our government. It doesn’t have to be this way.

In order to connect with cynical voters, a critical component of your stump speech should be to explain you understand their concerns about money in politics and are committed to addressing them. Voters understand that in order to have a government that is working in their best interests—on every issue from health care to the economy—we need a government that is not dependent on the wealthy people and corporations who traditionally fund campaigns. You have an opportunity to show your commitment to making that happen.

This briefing book will give you resources to connect with voters on the issue of money in politics. Included you will find:

- Polling showing strong voter support for money-in-politics reforms.
- Top messages for connecting with voters on the issue of money in politics.
- Tips on how to respond to entrenched special interests who want to keep the big-money status quo.
- An explanation of how successful small-donor reforms work
- Policies to develop a comprehensive money-in-politics reform plan.
- Sample polling questions, social media guidance, example op-eds, and helpful campaign finance research tools.

By showing leadership and a commitment to money-in-politics reform on the campaign trail and in office, you can show voters that, like them, you believe our democracy works best when it represents everyone, not just those able to write the biggest campaign checks.
Polling: Voters Care About Money in Politics

Americans overwhelmingly think big donors have too much power in politics and want politicians who’ll work to raise the voices of everyday people in politics. They’re also more likely to support candidates who address the system.

- Research conducted for the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center in late 2016 and early 2017 found that money-in-politics reform had the highest level of support among voters across issues. And, importantly, voters connect economic inequality with the impacts of our broken campaign finance system.

- A growing number of Americans believe the federal government is corrupt. Forty-four percent of Americans believe corruption is pervasive in the White House—up from 36 percent in 2016 (Transparency International, December 2017).

- Ninety-four percent of people blame “wealthy political donors” as a cause of dysfunction in our political system (Washington Post/University of Maryland, October 2017).

- Voters think policy in Washington is driven by big donors. A majority of voters—54 percent—think the tax plan passed by Congress last year will benefit large political donors over regular Americans (CBS News, December 2017).

- Voters want politicians to stand up to big money. Just under half of Texas voters think Sen. Ted Cruz is more responsive to big donors than ordinary Texans. And, importantly, support for his opponent, Rep. Beto O’Rourke, increases when voters hear he doesn’t accept corporate PAC money (Public Policy Polling/End Citizens United, January 2018). Voters favor elected leaders who promise to reform this issue. More broadly, when Democrats running for U.S. Senate ran on a money-in-politics-reform agenda, their favorability ratings went up by 7-15 points (End Citizens United, July 2017).

- Reform policies are popular. Seventy-two percent support a policy to match small donations with public funds (GQRR, December 2015); 60 percent of New Hampshire voters support a “democracy vouchers” program for state elections (Public Policy Polling, December 2017); nearly three-in-four Americans support a constitutional amendment to limit spending (ALG Research, February 2016), and large majorities of Democrats (84 percent) and Republicans (72 percent) favor limiting the amount of money individuals and organizations can spend on politics (Pew Research Center, 2015).
The number one issue for most Americans is the economy—people want job security, they’re trying to put food on the table, or they’re worried about how to pay for healthcare and their kids’ college. That’s why it’s important to talk about the role that money in politics plays in blocking progress on these and other issues. Meet people where they are on kitchen table issues, reference American ideals of a government of, by, and for the people, then offer concrete policy solutions.

### Tie Our Broken System to “Kitchen Table” Issues

#### The Economy and Money in Politics:

Our economy won’t work for all of us until we reduce the power big donors and corporate lobbyists have over our government. These wealthy special interests often have different priorities than most Americans. When government works for big donors, corporations keep wages down and politicians prioritize the economic interests of the ultra-rich. Making our economy work for all of us starts with making sure lobbyists and billionaire donors can’t buy access and special favors.

#### The Tax Bill and Money in Politics:

The tax bill passed last year is nothing more than a handout to big donors and corporate special interests at the expense of everyone else through cuts to vital programs like Medicare and Social Security. A handful of members of Congress even admitted they were passing the bill to please their big money backers. That’s not how our government should work. That’s why I support policies that reduce the power of big money in politics and give regular people a bigger voice. We need to add balance back to our political system so those with more money can’t just buy policy that works for them.

#### Healthcare and Money in Politics:

One reason healthcare in this country is so expensive is the power of drug companies and health insurers. They get the ear of elected officials and buy sweetheart deals. To have the chance to reduce the cost of healthcare we should reduce the power of big money by passing policies that give everyday people a bigger voice in our elections. Big Pharma shouldn’t be able to buy policy with their campaign contributions.

#### Gun Safety Policy and Money in Politics:

Following tragedy after tragedy, Americans have come together to demand our leaders take action to prevent gun violence and make our communities safer, yet money from the gun lobby has scared politicians away from passing popular, commonsense policies—even as 90 people a day die by a gun in this country. The NRA and their army of lobbyists have spent millions to buy votes and silence politicians. The safety of our families and our children must come first. I will stand up to the gun lobby and I’ll work to create a democracy in which the voices of everyday people matter more than big money.
Clean Energy and Money in Politics:

America should lead the world in the creation of renewable energy, but too often big money stands in the way. Congress gives big oil companies massive tax breaks after taking their campaign cash instead of funding programs that’ll reduce climate change, incentivize investment in renewables, and lead to a better future for our children. A sustainable energy future depends on a democracy in which every voice can be heard above the demands of big donors and their lobbyists.

Our Country’s Ideals

In addition to tying the lack of progress on issues voters care about to our broken campaign finance system, referencing our American ideals of government of, by, and for the people is a powerful, and effective way to connect with voters. Offer a positive, aspirational vision of how we can strengthen our democracy. Below are a few survey-tested examples that resonate with voters.

Unrigging the Rules of Our Democracy

• The rules of our democracy are rigged in favor of wealthy donors, special interests, and their lobbyists. It leaves Congress unable to solve the problems facing most Americans.
• We must do something to fix the corrupting influence of big money on policymaking to make sure we can move forward on the critical issues facing our country.

Ensuring Every Voice Matters

• We need to build a democracy where everyone participates, every vote is counted, and everyone’s voice is heard; where people from all walks of life can run for and win office, not just the wealthy and well-connected.
• America is a nation of teachers, caregivers, inventors, entrepreneurs, and workers. Our country’s strength is grounded in our ability to take many perspectives and work together as one in our self-governance.
• Instead of requiring candidates to spend their time raising money from big donors in order to raise the money they need to win, we can create a way for candidates with community support to raise enough money to win without relying on big donors. That way, people running for office and those in office can spend more time talking with and listening to their constituents.

Upholding American Ideals

• The Founders envisioned that in a democracy, the government is supposed to be of, by, and for the people. But right now, we are far from that.
• There are straightforward steps we can take to raise the voices of everyday people, reduce the power of big money, and ensure that everyone has an equal say in our government.
Creating Progress and a Better Future for All

• When wealthy special interests have too much power and make the rules, working and middle class families get left behind.
• To make sure our children and grandchildren have a free and fair America, we must come together to make our democracy work for all of us, through commonsense reforms that empower everyday people and reduce the power of wealthy donors.

Simple Policy Solutions

Polling shows voters are more likely to support candidates who don't just talk about the problem of our broken system, but offer concrete solutions. In addition to the framing suggestions above, here are some short messages to explain policy proposals that can be used in your stump speech or as platform language on your website (detailed later in this book, starting on page 8).

• I want to reduce the power of big money and give everyday people a bigger say in politics. We can do this by giving small donors more influence in elections, limiting the size of large contributions, making political spending more transparent, and holding accountable people who break the rules. A comprehensive reform plan will restore voters’ faith in their elected officials and strengthen our democracy.

• We need to encourage more participation in politics by regular people. I support programs that match small donations to make politicians more accountable to their constituents and allow more candidates with strong community support to be able to run for office, regardless of their connections to big donors.

• I support limits on the amount of money big donors and corporations can give to candidates because we need to add some balance back to our democracy.

• Voters deserve to know who’s trying to influence their views and their elected representatives. Political spending, by candidates and outside groups, should be open and transparent.

• We need better enforcement of our laws. Candidates should be held accountable for breaking the rules and face real consequences, not just a slap on the wrist.

• American elections should be about Americans. We need to make sure foreign money stays out of our elections.

• We need policies that actively encourage more people to cast their ballots like expanding voting hours, automatically registering Americans to vote, restoring voting rights for formerly incarcerated individuals, and consistency across the states.

• Whether its drawing lines for Congress or state legislatures, we need fair districts where voters can choose their representatives with a fair, open and accountable process.

For a good example of a comprehensive democracy reform platform, check out House candidate Angie Craig’s “Clean Campaigns, Clean Government” platform, “a sweeping reform agenda aimed at taking corporate money out of our campaigns, making the federal government more transparent, and keeping our elected officials honest and working for us.” She's just one of many House candidates this year who have pledged to take on our broken campaign finance system.
Responding to Critics

When trying to shift the balance of power in our democracy, there will always be some entrenched interests, like big donors and their lobbyists, who benefit from the status quo and don't want it to change.

Here are some key things to keep in mind:

- When it comes to reforming the way elections are funded, our position is the popular one. Americans are fed up with the power big donors have in our politics, and vast majorities across party lines strongly embrace reforms such as small-donor public financing to give everyday people a bigger say in our democracy.
- While voters tend to be distrustful of politicians in general, candidates who support reform have an advantage over anyone who prefers the current system.
- Don't try to defend the current system. Contrast your support for change with your opponent's defense of the way things are.

If you do face criticism for supporting money-in-politics reforms, use it to your advantage to show you are the one fighting for change while your opponent wants to keep things as they are or give big donors more power. Here is a short set of potential criticisms and sample responses.

**Criticism 1: You criticize outside groups and want them to be transparent, but you’re benefiting from that money, too. You’re just a hypocrite.**

This is the most common criticism from opponents of reform, but message and survey research shows it’s not very effective. Voters will respond positively to focusing on your opponent’s defense of the status quo and offering your proactive proposal to change the system.

Response:
- My opponent is just trying to distract voters from the fact that I’m the only candidate in this race who wants to change the system so we can reduce the power of big money and give everyday people a bigger voice in politics. My opponent wants to keep letting special interests spend unlimited amounts of money to influence our elections.
- My plan would limit the amount of money special interests can spend on elections, it’d give small donors a bigger say, and it’d add much needed transparency to the process.

You could also show contrast with your opponent by saying you won’t take money from lobbyists or corporate PACs, though this will work best if you have a comprehensive reform plan too. In 2017, many Virginia House of Delegates candidates said they wouldn’t take money from Dominion Energy, a big donor, to avoid the appearance of corruption and fight the industry’s power over state politics. Thirteen challengers who signed the pledge won.

“Dominion is a state-regulated monopoly and as a first-time candidate, I wanted my constituents to know that I would be overseeing Dominion with their interests at heart,” Delegate Schuyler VanValkenburg said after he won his election.
Criticism 2: Money will always find a way into politics. Trying to get rid of it is a fool’s errand.

Response:

• I believe that Americans can do just about anything we set our minds to, and that includes making our democracy work for everyone.
• What I can pledge is this—once elected, I’ll fight for a system in which everyone’s voices are heard—not just big donors—so we can focus on creating an economy that works for all of us.
• We need to transform the way our elections are funded, so candidates have the option to run with solely the support of everyday voters they wish to represent instead of big-money donors.
• With policies like small-donor public financing—like those working in Maine, Seattle, and other places around the country—the influence of big money has been reduced and the voices of everyday Americans can be heard.

Criticism 3: We can’t afford taxpayer-financed elections, or welfare for politicians. Politicians can raise their own money to run for office.

Response:

• Right now, who’s able to run and win office is too often decided by a handful of elite donors. They get their candidates elected and call the shots on what policies get passed or blocked. We need to turn that around.
• If we don’t do something to fix the corrupting influence of big money on policymaking, progress will continue to be blocked on critical issues of all kinds while big donors and special interests will unfairly profit and benefit and hard-working Americans will be left to suffer the consequences.
• Successful small-donor programs are a fraction of any budget, can be paid for in a variety of ways, and would add some much-needed integrity to the process. They’ve worked in cities and states across the country, opening up the process to more candidates and putting ordinary people in charge of our elections.
• Just like we pay for poll workers and voting machines, this is a critical investment in the health of our democracy.

Criticism 4: Organizations should be able to speak out on the issues they and their members care about. People who want to limit money in politics want to shut down the First Amendment rights of those who simply disagree.

Response:

• The problem is, what we are seeing now, is that those with the most money are able to speak the loudest, and they’re drowning out the voices of everyone else.
• First Amendment rights are upheld when we are able to fully engage in the political marketplace of ideas. When a handful of wealthy donors are able to drown out the rest of us, that hurts yours and my free speech.
• The answer is in proposing real solutions to address these problems, like small-donor public financing or other policies that’ll increase transparency and add more accountability to our politics and enhance free speech.
Core Policy Solution: Empowering Small Donors

To rebalance our democracy so that regular people can be heard above the power of big money, we need to create a system in which all candidates for office can run on the strength of support from their communities. The primary way to do this is through creating small donor programs that have been successfully implemented in over 30 states and localities around the country.

Successful and popular small donor programs have three main principles:
• they empower ordinary Americans by giving them a bigger voice in the process,
• they increase political participation, and
• they reduce the power of big donors.

These programs have reduced the amount of time candidates have to spend raising money from their donors, enabled them to spend more time talking to ordinary voters, and added much-needed balance to our democracy.

“No other measure...can move the needle and directly impact and increase the number of women and people of color.”

- New York City Public Advocate Tish James

With these programs, participating candidates who forgo big money contributions can power their campaigns with small donations from everyday people and limited public funds. These small donations are typically under $150 in most policies and matched at a certain ratio (for example, New York City matches donations on a six-to-one basis). This means a $30 donation from a teacher or minimum wage worker might become a $210 donation, greatly increasing the importance of small donors in elections.

In Congress, Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.) and Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) have introduced their own legislation—the Government by the People Act and the Fair Elections Now Act, respectively—to create matching fund programs for congressional elections. Learn more about those bills at ofby.us. These proposals can be done in a variety of ways, in addition to the matching fund solution above. Seattle just successfully implemented a democracy voucher program and the Washington, D.C. City Council just passed a program that blends small grants with matching funds. Small-donor policies can be right-sized for your community.

“No other measure...can move the needle and directly impact and increase the number of women and people of color (in elected office),” said New York City Public Advocate Tish James, the first African-American woman elected citywide in New York City, in an interview with Every Voice.

Here’s how to include such a proposal in your policy platform: I want to reduce the power of big money and raise the voices of everyday Americans by establishing a small-donor matching system for Congressional elections. Candidates with strong community support who forgo large contributions will have their small donations matched to make sure they can be heard alongside wealthy donors and their lobbyists. These systems have been successful in cities and states across the country.
A Comprehensive Policy Platform

A small-donor public financing program must be at the core of any effort to effectively reduce the power of big money in our elections, yet these proposals should be part of a larger comprehensive program to truly rebalance our democracy to put everyday people at the center.

While local, state, and federal laws differ, a comprehensive democracy plan can include policies under some or all of these five areas (which were developed and agreed upon by 12 leading national democracy reform organizations as part of the “Fight Big Money Agenda” in 2015):

1. **Participation** Encourage and amplify the voices of everyday Americans by legislating a system of public funding for qualified federal candidates, meaningful contribution limits, and measures to reduce barriers to the ballot box and increase turnout.

2. **An equal say**. Make it easier to vote by supporting policies that reduce barriers to the ballot box and increase turnout. Support meaningful contribution limits so a wealthy few cannot use their economic power to shut out ordinary citizens.

3. **Transparency**: Implement robust, real-time disclosure of political contributions and expenditures through legislation, or through supporting rulemaking at the FEC, FCC, IRS, and SEC.

4. **Commonsense rules**: Overturn *Citizens United* and earlier cases such as *Buckley v. Valeo* through the Democracy for All constitutional amendment.

5. **Accountability**: Strengthen existing campaign finance rules through the legislative process, create and fund a new enforcement agency with real power; and Senate confirmation administration nominees committed to enforcing existing law.

1. **Encourage Participation**

*Summary:* To give everyday people a bigger voice in politics, we need to encourage policies that put small donors at the center of the process, with matching funds, tax credits, or small-dollar vouchers.

*Top Message:* We need to provide incentives that encourage the active participation of small donors in our elections so candidates are accountable to the people—not wealthy donors and special interests.

*Policy:* I will work aggressively to pass legislation to provide public funds that will amplify small donations to federal candidates who agree to lower contribution limits.

We need to provide incentives such as matching funds that encourage the active participation of small donors in our elections so candidates aren’t dependent on wealthy donors. These programs are working in states and localities across the country, allowing a more reflective set of candidates to run for office and giving ordinary Americans a bigger say in their elections.
2. An Equal Say

**Summary:** We need to restore the Voting Rights Act, make it easier and more secure to cast a ballot, and impose commonsense limits on political contributions to ensure the wealthy don't have undue influence on our elections.

**Top Message:** From equal access to the ballot box to the right not to be silenced by big money, democracy requires everyone to have a voice in the decisions affecting their lives.

**Policy:** I will work aggressively to pass legislation to reduce barriers to the ballot box and increase turnout. I support meaningful contribution limits so a wealthy few cannot use their economic power to shut out ordinary citizens.

We need policies that actively encourage more people to cast their ballots like expanding voting hours to include nights and weekends, automatically registering Americans to vote, restoring voting rights for formerly incarcerated individuals who served their time, and making laws consistent across states. We need reasonable limits on using money in politics so our government doesn't just respond to wealthy donors and special interests when it should be responding to all Americans.

3. Transparency

**Summary:** The American people deserve to know who’s trying to influence politicians and the policy-making process. We need laws to create more disclosure of spending by outside groups and regulatory action by the SEC, FEC, and IRS to make sure outside spending groups and wealthy donors can’t hide from voters.

**Top Message:** Voters have a right to know who is trying to influence our views and our elected representatives.

**Policy:** I will work to pass legislation enacting new disclosure requirements for outside spending groups, urge federal agencies that clearly have within their mandate to require more disclosure of political spending to do so.

Americans should be able to easily look up candidates, online and in “real time,” to see what entities have spent substantial sums on the candidate’s behalf, and which donors have provided the funds, both during the election and afterwards. I support effective disclosure requirements so outside spending disclosure requirements outside spending groups cannot hide from voters the wealthy donors and special interest funding them.

4. Commonsense Rules

**Summary:** In a series of decisions, the Supreme Court has put our elections more squarely in the hands of big donors. We need justices who'll transform the Court's approach to money in politics and a constitutional amendment to correct the fundamentally flawed decisions.
**Top Message:** The size of your wallet should not determine the strength of your political voice. The fact is, in a long series of decisions beginning with Buckley v. Valeo and escalating with Citizens United v. FEC and McCutcheon v. FEC, the Supreme Court has cemented a flawed reading of our Constitution that strips the ability of We the People to write the rules by which we elect our representatives, such as commonsense limits on election spending.

**Policy:** Restore our pro-democracy Constitution by endorsing, prioritizing, and passing the Democracy for All amendment.

For Senators: I will confirm justices who will transform the Supreme Court’s approach to money in politics and revive the people’s ability to protect our democracy. For Members of the House: I will urge my Senate colleagues to confirm nominees who will transform the Supreme Court’s approach to money in politics and revive the people’s ability to protect our democracy.

5. **Accountability**

**Summary:** The rules we have in place governing our elections must be followed, and there should be consequences and accountability if they’re not. The Federal Election Committee must do its job in upholding our campaign finance laws or the agency must be reconstituted so it does.

**Top Message:** A fair and accessible election system requires strong enforcement of our laws so those who break them face real consequences.

**Policy:** I will work aggressively to pass legislation to create a new enforcement agency with real power to hold campaign violators accountable and legislation to shut down candidate-specific super PACs and strengthen the rules that prohibit coordination between candidates and outside spending groups.

Those who break the law must face real consequences. But the FEC consistently fails to enforce and properly interpret campaign finance laws. As a result, candidates and their political operatives constantly stretch, if not break, the laws with impunity. A new, real enforcement agency is needed to replace the FEC. In the meantime, the Senate should confirm individuals to the FEC who are committed to enforcing existing law.
Add Money-in-Politics Questions to Your Research

Poll after poll has found voters are upset about the power of money in our political system and support policies to rebalance the system and give everyday people a bigger voice in politics. We often find that while voters support certain reforms, such as making the economy fair for everyone, they support it in higher numbers when it is tied to an argument about how the obstacle to the reform is the influence of big money in politics.

We bet the voters in your district are no different, but it’s important to see exactly how strongly they believe this and how supportive they are of different policies. If you conduct polling for your campaign, here are some suggested questions to include in measuring your voters’ views on the issue so you can tailor your message correctly.

Tying Money in Politics to Your Top Issues

The economy is generally going to be the number one issue for voters and tying it to our broken money in politics system can make your message on the issue more effective.

Here’s a way to test that, which can be done using a split-sample test.

A: I am running for office so that working families can have their voices heard in Washington and have a fair chance to get ahead. In order to have an economy that works for all of us, not just those at the top, we need a democracy that works for all of us. I believe in a democracy in which the voices of everyday people are heard above the big donors and special interests funding our campaigns.

B. I am running for office so that working families can have their voices heard in Washington and have a fair chance to get ahead. We need an economy that works for all of us, not just those at the top.

You might also want to test money-in-politics issues in a battery with other key issues to see how it lines up.

Testing Support for Policy Changes

We find that support for campaign finance changes are the strongest when tied together in a comprehensive reform proposal.

For example:

Some people propose addressing the role of money in politics with a new law that would give regular people a bigger say by providing qualified candidates with limited public matching funds for small contributions they raise from constituents. The law would also require disclosure for all political spending by outside groups, limit large contributions, and strictly enforce election laws. Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose this proposal?
You could also break this up into a battery to test the strength various proposals on their own, but the strongest numbers will likely be as part of a comprehensive plan.

**Testing Your Opposition’s Message**

If you’re interested in learning how voters in your district feel about people who oppose commonsense campaign finance reforms, and whether that will hurt their position, here are a couple ways to do that.

**Testing A Broad Policy**

Are you more or less likely to support a candidate for Congress if he or she supports allowing wealthy donors donors and special interests to spend unlimited amounts of money on politics?

Are you more or less likely to support a candidate for Congress if he or she opposes efforts to reduce the power of big money in politics?

**Comparing Proposals**

If you’re concerned about criticism from your opponents, you could do a split test to see how strongly your opponent’s message resonates with voters (hint: usually it’s not as strong as a positive, pro-active reform message). Here’s an example.

Now I’d like to read two statements about this proposal. Please tell me which comes closer to your point of view, even if neither is exactly right:

Statement A: We need a government of, by, and for the people - not government bought and paid for by wealthy donors. It’s time we let big donors and private companies pay their fair share of taxes, rather than paying for politicians who will write them special tax breaks. By replacing large contributions from CEOs, PACs, and lobbyists with small contributions from everyday Americans and limited public funds, we’ll make every voice count in Washington.

Statement B: Paying for elections with tax dollars is just welfare for politicians. It means politicians will use millions of our taxpayer dollars to fund their campaigns instead of other important issues. Tax money will go to bumper stickers, yard signs, and even negative attacks, and the proposal would require a costly bureaucracy to police our speech. It leaves the super PACs alone, which means it won’t really clean up politics. This is not a good use of our tax dollars.
Social Media Guidance

Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook aren't normally the place to have nuanced conversations about policy, but there are simple ways to talk about reform policy in 280 characters or less. We'd also suggest adding share graphics with quotes from your candidate about why they support reform.

Here are some ideas to start, but think about how you can infuse your campaign's top message with a pledge to fight for reform.

To have an economy that works for all of us, we need elections that works for all of us. We can fight big money & give everyone a fair shot.

It's simple: 1) reduce big money, 2) empower regular people, 3) create a democracy that works for all of us.

If elected, I’ll fight for you—for better jobs, for higher wages, and for a government that’s truly of, by, and for the people, not big donors.

We must protect our planet for our children's future. To do that, we need sensible energy policy that’s not bought and paid for by Big Oil.

I’m running to give you a voice in the Congress—not lobbyists or big donors. I'll fight for a democracy that works for all of us.

My opponent continues to defend the big money status quo, but I have a plan to give you a bigger voice in politics: <LINK>
Money Creates Barriers
Eugene Weekly | February 5, 2017
By: Oregon State Senator James Manning

I know firsthand that running for political office costs money. As a candidate for House District 14 in West Eugene and Junction City, I made a lot of fundraising calls. I didn't (and still don't) mind raising money and I think I'm not too bad at it. Every candidate needs resources to explain to voters about why they're running to serve and what ideas they have for fixing the biggest problems facing your community.

But the need for increasing amounts of money to run seems like winning is more about who you know than what you hope to do for Oregon. Raising so much cash becomes a barrier for those without wealth or access to wealthy donors — particularly people of color and women — from running and winning office.

We all lose when it's harder for everyday Oregonians to get elected. We lose a diverse range of voices. We lose good ideas that never get heard, or are drowned out by the issues important to the wealthy and powerful. And we lose faith in our very democracy.

I hear from so many Oregonians who feel their voices don't matter in Salem. But they know what matters to them and their family: affordable healthcare and housing, a fairer criminal justice system and more equitable education and job training opportunities. These are issues that too often get short shrift in our policymaking.

If we want all Oregonians to have an equal chance to run for office and an equal voice in our democracy, we must give candidates a different pathway to run for office, one that doesn't rely on wealthy donors to fund their campaigns.

Fortunately, the Oregon Legislature has the opportunity to pass a bill that does just that. The Small Donor Elections bill introduced by my colleague Rep. Dan Rayfield would be a big step towards removing the financial barriers to running for office and participating in state politics. House Bill 2578 offers more Oregonians an avenue to engage in politics and allows candidates to spend less time raising money from big donors and more time talking with neighbors and voters about their biggest concerns.

Passing this bill would give candidates for legislative and judicial offices a choice: raise money the usual way, or cap your contributions at no more than $250. If you choose the cap under the Small Donor Elections program, and show you have a wide base of grassroots support, then those small donations are matched six to one with limited public funds. It treats everyone like a big donor, so even small donations have a big impact. This way, candidates focused on small donations can run a competitive campaign.
Just imagine, instead of spending so much time talking to affluent donors, candidates can spend more
time talking to ordinary constituents. And when you don’t need a handful of wealthy donors on speed
dial to run for office, it reduces the barriers for people of all backgrounds to run for office.

Small Donor Elections is supported by a diverse coalition of groups who are on the front lines of
advancing the interests of Oregon residents including working families, women, people of color, small
businesses, and LGBTQ individuals. They understand what I know to be true: when you empower small
donors, you create a democracy that works for everyone, not just those who are used to holding the
purse strings.

Small Donor Elections will keep Oregon as a leader in creating a strong democracy, and there is no
better time to stand up and demonstrate we support this ideal. I urge my colleagues to pass this
legislation swiftly.

Restoring people’s faith in government
Baltimore Sun | April 16, 2015
By: House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi and Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.)

In Maryland and across the country, Americans are growing deeply cynical about Washington. And for
good reason. They perceive that policymaking is increasingly an insider’s game, with little role for the
public itself. They feel that their voices go unheard in Congress. And they see, time and time again, how
the issues they care about most — like creating good jobs, strengthening small business and protecting
the environment — are blocked by special interests.

It’s little surprise that a record number of Americans stayed home from the polls last November — the
lowest voter turnout since 1942.

The reality is that powerful industries and interest groups have used their wealth to amass
unprecedented political power. With so many lawmakers dependent on these sources of campaign
funding, the institution of Congress too often leans in their direction and away from the priorities of
everyday citizens. Convinced that their vote — and their voice — doesn’t matter, millions of Americans
are exiting the political town square. Extreme elements then rush in to fill the vacuum and the
discourse becomes even more hard-edged and alienating.

With Americans fast losing confidence in our democracy, it’s time to ring the alarm bells and launch a
creative and sustained push to restore the public’s faith in government.

One path is to expand access to the polls and do more to encourage voting. That’s the reason to restore
Section V of the Voting Rights Act, which was struck down by the Supreme Court last year. But we need
to do more. As important as it is to protect access to the ballot box, we must also ensure that the ballot
box arrives safely in Washington. That means curbing the influence of lobbyists and deep-pocketed
donors who seek to hijack it along the way.

We can do this by setting up a small-donor fundraising system that can compete with today’s big-
money politics. I am proud to have authored the Government By the People Act (H.R.20), which would allow candidates to turn away from the current donor class of PACs and lobbyists and power their campaigns with a combination of small donations and public matching funds. It would reward candidates who build strong ties to their communities and work actively to engage the citizenry. A small-donor matching system would also reinvigorate our democracy by empowering a more diverse pool of candidates who would have the resources to run, compete and win.

Just imagine your representative in Washington standing in your living room, listening to your priorities and making policy decisions that benefit you — all because your voice matters. That’s the promise of a small-donor matching system.

In Maryland, public financing is already an option for gubernatorial candidates. And this week, Maryland legislators voted overwhelmingly for a bill to restore a tax check off box that will help restock our state’s public financing fund. Moreover, last fall the Montgomery County Council passed legislation that will allow candidates for County Council and county executive to qualify for public financing.

By combining these kinds of efforts at the state and local levels with the Government By the People Act, Americans can fight big-money politics, restore their faith in Washington and return to a government of, by and for the people.

We must disclose the sources of the money in our campaigns, amend the Constitution to reverse the grievous error of the Citizens United decision, reform our broken campaign finance system and empower citizens everywhere to exercise their right to vote.

The Government by the People Act would help build a politics and a government that answer to the people. Together, we can reassert the full promise of our ideals and restore confidence in our democracy.
Other Resources

**EveryVoice.org.** Visit our website for more information on small-donor policies, updates on ongoing campaigns, and breaking news on money-in-politics issues.

**OpenSecrets.org.** Center for Responsive Politics is the nation's leading nonpartisan research group, tracking money in politics, and publishing their findings on their award winning website OpenSecrets.org.

**EndCitizensUnited.org.** End Citizens United is another organization working to defeat opponents of money-in-politics reform and elect candidates who'll fight for a stronger democracy.

**FollowTheMoney.org.** The National Institute on Money in State Politics researches and archives campaign-donor, lobbyist, and other government disclosed information from the federal, state, and local level.

**MapLight.org.** MapLight is a nonpartisan research organization that provides citizens with transparency tools that enable them to track data demonstrating money's influence on politics in the U.S. Congress and in states and cities around the country.

**FEC.gov.** The FEC's Campaign Finance Disclosure Portal provides a single point of entry to federal campaign finance data.