

Good essay about following the money trail: campaign finance reform in "big sky b...

[Business](#), [Company](#)



The Frontline documentary “ Big Sky Big Money” investigates campaign finance reform and focuses on Montana, where political elections are being influence by special interests with deep pockets. The special begins by framing the debate by discussing recent legislation and the Supreme Court ruling on Citizens United vs. the Federal Election Committee. Citizens United is a conservative political action committee (PAC) which has received substantial financial support from the infamous Koch Brothers, oil billionaires who used their money to pursue a specific ideological agenda, including climate change denial. Citizens United produced a documentary about Hillary Clinton, and wanted to advertise the film on television, a violation of the 2002 Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA). Also known as the McCain-Feingold Act, the BCRA seeks to limit the role “ soft” money plays in election cycles. It specifically sought to limit issue advocacy television ads by corporate entities. For example, the “ swiftboating” of John Kerry during the 2004 presidential election. Citizens United sued, believing their freedom of speech was being violated. The documentary then exposes serious violations of campaign finance laws in Montana, involving mysterious shell entities, one major PAC’s address was a UPS box. Obviously, the reforms are not working. According to “ Big Sky Big Money,” despite regulations like McCain-Feingold, corporate and other interests are manipulating the political process in Montana, where 501(c)(4) advocacy groups have influenced the senate election between Jon Tester, an incumbent Democrat, and Republican Denny Rehberg. The documentary establishes that Republicans groups, led by the Koch Brothers, are skirting the laws of finance reform.

However, both sides of the aisle are gaming the system, and the Democrats

are also using outside “ soft” money to strengthen candidates in pivotal elections. Fore example, the American Bridge PAC, has aligned itself with right wing groups to file lawsuits looking to send campaign finance. Their argument is simple, voters do not care where the money comes from, and vote for the candidate they want to vote for. They argue that government should not limit peoples rights to be politically active, or curtail their exposure to political advertising. They believe in a political free-market. This seems clearly false, because understanding where a candidate and campaign gets their funding can help understand who they are, what their interests and allegiances lie, and may explain their political agenda. For example, a small organic farmer in Iowa would be interested if a candidate received substantial contributions from Monsanto. It is disingenuous for attorney representing PAC’s to assert otherwise.

A major problem is that most of these groups are not local, they are from outside Montana, looking to influence specific elections to pursue specific corporate or ideological interests. This is questionable for a number of reasons. If the House or Senate is very close, it is possible to wrestle majority control simply by investing hundreds of millions in key states. Therefore, the representation of the house is not organic, or truly representative of constituents, but a reflection of which candidates fit a specific corporate profile and agenda. The Founding Fathers would not be amused; the balance of power should not be swayed by corporate interests with profit motive deregulation as their only political agenda.

Ultimately, “ Big Sky Big Country” examines tough questions in an unbiased and straightforward manner. However, it raises more questions than it

answers. Some of the PAC's seem like simple criminal organizations, some of their documents were found in a meth house. One folder was literally labeled " Montana \$ Bomb." Ideologically, many people seem to subscribe to a libertarian philosophy of free-market political elections. However, the " dark money" groups, with vague generic names like American Tradition Partnership, are just examples of old fashioned political corruption with a new acronym. At least the Koch Brothers have a clear political agenda, some of these players are simply shadowy and corrupt power brokers - with no interest in political issues, ideals or values - out to make easy money.

Work Cited

" Big Sky, Big Money." PBS. PBS, n. d. Web. 18 Apr. 2015. .