

# A common sense, conservative approach to campaign finance reform

By John Pudner

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President Obama recently warned Americans about the perils of “dark money” in election politics, saying it “pulls us into the gutter” as a nation.

Unfortunately, he offered no real solutions to remedy this problem. So, I have a few suggestions for him and it begins with allowing common sense to enter the debate over campaign finance reform in America.

As conservatives, we believe in market solutions rather than government solutions. If a market is working well, access should go up and costs should go down. It’s the law of supply and demand.

But if we take a look at the situation today with regard to special influence money in politics, it’s just about the exact opposite of that right now. Our elected representatives are being influenced by billionaires like Michael Bloomberg who are only concerned with pushing their own agendas, and not enough by the rest of us who have to pay the bill.

So how do we reverse this trend? With a little bit of political courage, a lot of common sense and by offering conservative solutions to solve this problem.

For example, why not make Virginia’s tax credit for small donations the law of the land? Overnight, it would allow hardworking Americans to keep a little bit of their money they would have sent to the IRS and instead give a \$50 or \$100 contribution to candidates they believe would reign in Washington’s tax and spend culture.

Recently, liberals launched an effort to remove a similar law in Oregon. If they succeed and if grassroots conservatives are dissuaded from giving, large special interests, like the teacher’s union, will become even more influential.

We can also take action to prevent people from being punished over political contributions. Brendan Eich, the creator of JavaScript and former CEO of the web browser company Mozilla, was forced out of his job for giving a \$1,000 contribution to a traditional marriage referendum. Part of a conservative approach to campaign finance reform might be a law to prohibit anyone from losing their job simply for standing up for their beliefs.

If we don’t act now, how long will it be until someone is fired because he or she is a member of the NRA? Or gave to a school choice organization? Or to the Catholic Church?

Along the same lines, it’s time to revisit disclosure and what voters deserve to know. The current disclosure level in the U.S. is \$200. However, right now, 63% of contributions to the House of Representatives come from people who give over \$200.

And while transparency is key and high-level donors should be identified, do we really need to report someone who is giving their first \$500 check? Could we consider upping the limit at which you are reported? Does anyone really think someone is buying a Congressman for \$500 in this day and age?

We certainly don’t expect everyone to agree with us on every point we raise, or even to agree with us at all. But we want to have a good debate. We need a good debate.

Conservatives need to start thinking about why our political system has gone so off-kilter and why it so often fails to bring the results the people want and for which they vote.

We are simply saying "look at the role of money in politics as a part of this — we know it influences the system, but how? Does it lead to increased spending in the interests of those who give money? Does it lead to regulations that benefit certain companies or special interests rather than the general interest? Does it force members of Congress to spend too much time raising money rather than spending time listening to ordinary citizens?" I think the answer is yes.

Some people on the left like to blame cable news for the polarization of our politics. Others say it's gerrymandering or the pressure of entitlement spending or something else. I'm simply saying that it's time for a debate about the role of money in politics. And that debate is already happening -- but right now it's happening only on the left, and we need the voices of conservatives and others to take part in this debate. Start thinking about the issue and you might be surprised where you come out — and how many other conservatives will agree with you, starting with Barry Goldwater.

As we embark on the all-important road to the 2016, it's time to expand the market for political speech and let new voices be heard on our nation's journey to Election Day. Those "new entrants" are us: "We, the People."

It's time to Take Back Our Republic.

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