

Dismantling the Web Reclaiming Our Elections

by Jim Tarbell

Four hundred years ago, kings granted corporate charters cautiously because they knew that concentrating capital also concentrated power. Kings used corporate charters to exercise their authority over this concentration of wealth to make sure it served the public and royal good.

This issue of *Justice Rising on Reclaiming Our Elections* is the first in a trilogy on modern day *Money in Democracy*. These three issues will examine how wealthy elites and corporate executives subvert the special corporate privilege to concentrate our national wealth and use it to implement government policies that increase their own wealth and concentrate their power, often with injurious results for our common good. As Bill Moyers says, money in politics is the "dagger directed at the heart of democracy."

The next issue will investigate how corporate treasuries play an overpowering role in telling the government what to do. It will also look at how we can turn that around and make the voice of the people heard in the hearts of our government.

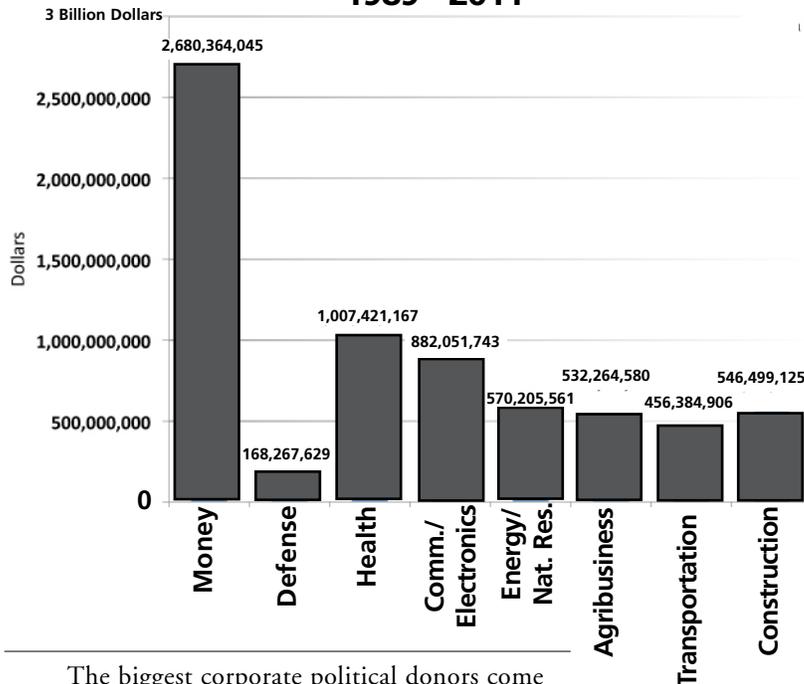
In the third issue of the trilogy, *Justice Rising* will study how corporations fund and funnel their personnel into positions of governmental power, and also make government service a training camp for the advancement of corporate rule by dangling and then delivering pots of gold into the hands of former government officials as they move through the revolving corporate door into lives as corporate lobbyists and executives.

We must fulfill the dream of the 1880s reformers who thought that civil service employment should be based on merit, ability and a dedication to creating a government that promotes the common good.

The most recent onslaught of corporate money power began in 1971. That year leading corporate lawyer Lewis Powell sent a memo to the US Chamber of Commerce urging that they undertake a campaign to reassert corporate authority in the face of the advances made for the public good during the 1960s.

Powell then moved on to the Supreme Court where he participated in a series of decisions allowing a flood of corporate money into our elections. The success of this campaign by the rich has become obvious in the "wealth primary," when a candidate becomes a front runner, simply by raising the most money, long before there is even a primary election. As veteran Washington reporter Jeffrey Birnbaum points out, "a run for the presidency... starts with the approval of the fund-raiser class." The success of this wealth-friendly filter is reflected in the fact that the median income of our federal legislators in 2009 was \$911,000, with senators averaging an amazing \$2.38 million.

Largest Industry Contributors to Federal Elections 1989 - 2011



The biggest corporate political donors come from the firms that handle our privatized money supply including banks, financial firms, insurance companies, and real estate businesses. They have invested over \$2.68 billion in federal election campaigns in the last 22 years—two-and-a-half times as much money as any other industry group. We saw their payback in the billions of bailouts they received amidst the financial crisis. Goldman Sachs, far and away the biggest contributor in this group, was also a great beneficiary of government largesse.

In our post-Citizens United world, where contributions to the huge new super-PACs are not disclosed, it will be hard to know which special interest is investing the most in our "public servants." But transparency is not the only thing being destroyed. Publicly financed campaign systems are threatened by recent Roberts Court decisions. On top of that, those who brought us Citizens United have a long list of lawsuits that could completely eliminate any restrictions on using corporate treasuries to create corporate-friendly policies that subvert the public good.

A final question in regard to corporations and our electoral system is—given corporate leaders' obvious interest in manipulating the political system by dominating the cash contributions—are they also involved in hacking the electronic voting machines to alter final vote counts in favor of their candidates? It would certainly be a sensible hedge in their drive for risk aversion.

These are all big questions for American citizens to answer. This issue of *Justice Rising* is a beginning to finding the answers.

Data from the Center for Responsive Politics, opensecrets.org

We must fulfill the dream of the 1880s reformers who thought that civil service employment should be based on merit, ability and a dedication to creating a government that promotes the common good.