

Corporate Coup — Popular Pushback

by Jim Tarbell

All politics comes down to people versus money.
— Senator Thomas Hart Benton

This quote by the 19th Century western expansionist Senator succinctly reflects what many know about politics. The patriots knew it when they destroyed shiploads of tea belonging to the British East India Company. In fact, the American Revolution was a revolt against the power of money that had taken over British national policy.

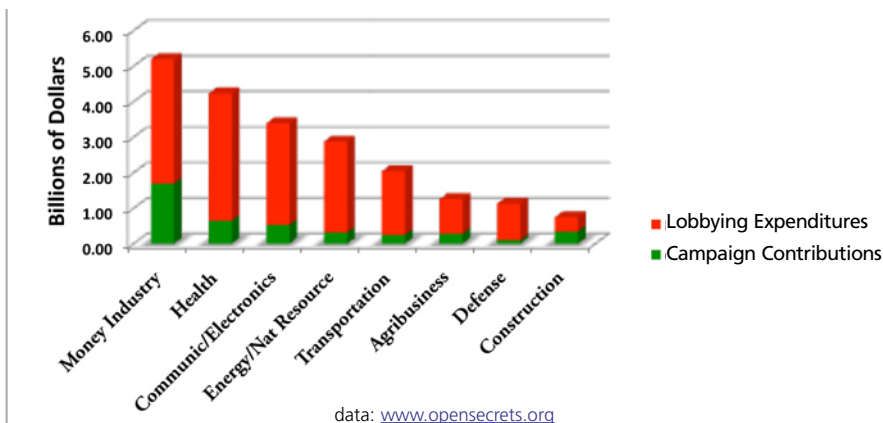
Apologists for modern day corporate lobbying claim that since the founders put the right “to petition the government for a redress of grievances” into the First Amendment, they must have wanted lobbyists hounding government decision makers. History professor Jeffrey L. Pasley, however, points out, “It would have been directly contrary to the hopes of the Federal Constitution’s framers if the new government had been immediately overrun by pressure group politics.”

Now we live in an age when corporate pressure groups have overrun national policy. Starting in the early 1970s (see page 14) corporate money began a long campaign to build our national policies around a corporate agenda. Using lobbyists and think tanks financed by corporate treasuries and corporate-funded foundations, the non-human “corporate person” now occupies our government control room.

Contrary to public perceptions, the “corporate person” has arrived in that position by spending much more on lobbying and think tanks than on financing electoral campaigns. Between 2001 and 2010, the eight largest corporate sectors spent \$16.68 billion dollars on lobbying. That is four times as much as they spent on campaign contributions. If you add in miscellaneous business lobbying, it gets up over \$20 billion. These eight corporate sectors spent 80% of all money spent on lobbying

The popular narrative is that lobbyists bribe federal officials with suitcases of this cash. That is not exactly the case. While Republicans try to drown government by cutting funding, corporate lobbyists gain sway by providing “services” that politicians, regulators and judges need, but cannot afford. These services include putting on campaign fundraisers, forming bogus grassroots pressure groups, providing office services, sharing political intelligence, placing advertising in politically connected venues and offering legal advice. It may not be suitcases of cash, but it is millions of dollars in services. You decide if it is bribery.

Lobbying & Electoral Expenditures by the Eight Largest Corporate Sectors, 2001-2010



Besides lobbying, corporate money has also been flowing into policy research institutes like the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the Heritage Foundation. These think tanks first perfected pro-corporate policy development and dissemination using linguistic spin and modern communications technologies more like a PR firm. As the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy points out, “these groups operate more like ‘extra — party’ organizations adopting the tactics of a permanent political campaign.”

Once these institutions put out their spin the corporate media picks up the ball and runs with it. They quickly launched into using “free market” when referring to our economic system where money is power. They also popularized the term “free trade” when discussing a global trading system colonized by corporations with budgets bigger and more powerful than most of the nations of the world.

This issue of *Justice Rising* gives you in-depth stories of different aspects of the corporate take over of American public policy. But it also gives you a view of the popular pushback that is growing both in this country and around the world. The Occupy Movement, though now in a winter hibernation, is still alive and active and set to burst back on the scene this spring. At the same time, the drive to end corporate personhood has been adopted as official policy by the largest municipal governments in the land (see page 2).

Change is coming, but confronting the empire is not easy and its success should not be taken for granted. Only when concerned citizens devote their full participation to building a movement more powerful than money will policies for the common good gain power over policies of the 1%.

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AfD Co-chair David Delk (left), a fully participatory citizen, whose Supreme Court antics have been replicated by many others. photo: Bobby Allyn