



UnCommon Wealth:

Outside Spending and Influence in the 2022 Pennsylvania
Senate Election

Pennsylvania Report

June 6, 2022

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Executive Summary

With the astounding rise in election spending and divisive dark money campaigns in America, the Pennsylvania 2022 Senate election has been, and will continue to be, dominated by outside spending groups and a national “donor class.” These donors and outside groups are spending millions of dollars to define “viable” candidates, distort facts, hype misleading attacks, and drown out the voices and ideas of ordinary Pennsylvania voters. The sheer cost of campaigning has created a “pay-to-play” system, where the only candidates with a chance are the ones with access to millions of dollars through personal wealth and/or national donor networks. The hyper-targeted ad campaigns paid for by this money will be overwhelmingly divisive and negative, and they will ignore many of the issues of most concern to Pennsylvanians.

This report from American Promise is part of a series of non-partisan reports on how vast sums of money from a tight national network of donors and special interests, both Republican and Democratic, impacts Americans and our elections (See, e.g. [Under the Avalanche: Inside Maine’s \\$200 Million Senate Race](#)). American Promise is a non-partisan national organization working to unite Americans behind a constitutional solution to the runaway money and corruption problem in American elections. With members and supporters across Pennsylvania and nationwide, American Promise Pennsylvania members have launched [For Our Freedom Pennsylvania](#).

– Jeff Clements, President, American Promise;
Connor Flotten, Research Associate, American Promise;
David Black, former CEO, Harrisburg Chamber of Commerce;
Jennifer Mann, President, JL Mann Consulting LLC and former State Representative

IN UNCOMMON WEALTH, WE REACH THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS:



Pennsylvanians can expect to be bombarded with hundreds of millions of dollars worth of political advertisements for their Senate race alone.

The Super PACs running many of these ads are closely entwined with the national Republican and Democratic Senate leadership and political operatives in Washington.

A majority of the money that will flow into the Pennsylvania election comes from wealthy donors and interests outside of Pennsylvania.

This money will fund negative attacks and restrict free speech and voter information.

Americans across the political spectrum overwhelmingly support regulations to limit the biggest donors in politics,¹ including the For our Freedom Amendment, which would give Pennsylvanians the freedom to better regulate how money is deployed in elections – protecting election integrity, the voices and representation of Pennsylvanians, and combating systemic corruption.

Introduction

The story of this election was clear from before the primary elections took place: only the rich need apply. The only candidates who were able to mount viable campaigns in the Senate primaries were those with the resources to spend millions of dollars on advertisements, either through personal wealth or the ability to raise money from outside the state. If connections and wealth are necessary to even consider running for office, then most people are priced out of being able to represent their community.

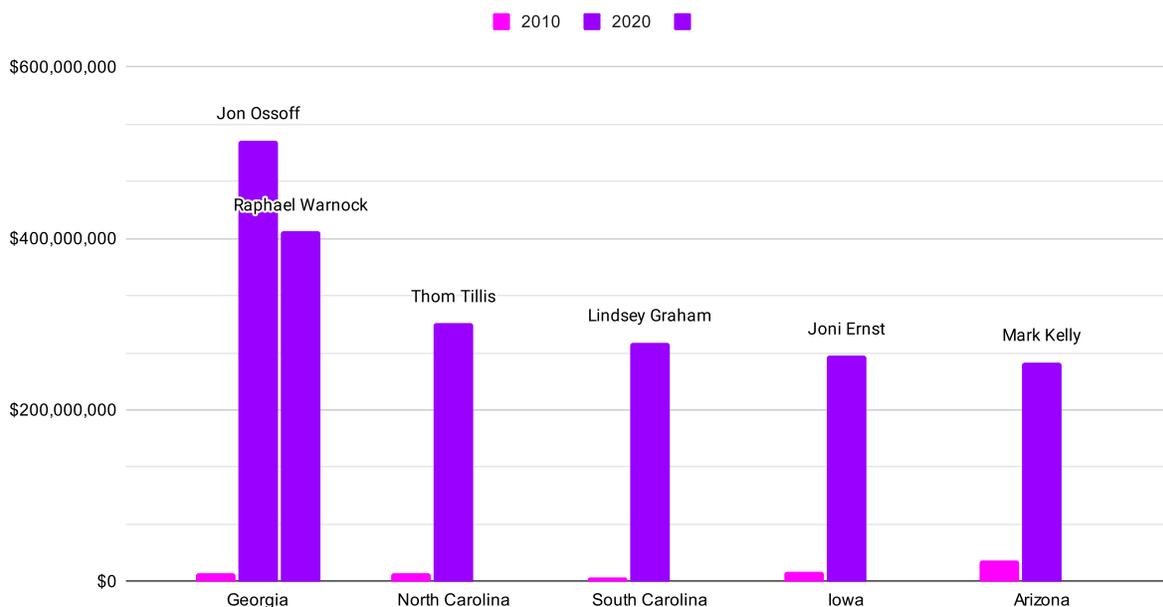
Already, a recent survey of Pennsylvania voters by Citizen Data found that more than two-thirds of voters think of politics in their state as “seriously off on the wrong track.” People understand that our government and elected officials aren’t working as they should, and they aren’t working for us. Based on our examination of how the new dark money system works in US Senate races and other elections, it is a near-certainty that the dominance of big donors, shady SuperPACs, billionaire, union and corporate money, and untested celebrity candidates will leave Pennsylvanian voters less informed, more frustrated, and even less well-represented – no matter who wins – when the 2022 election is over.

Background

The extraordinary scale and impact of concentrated money in American elections over the past few years is not always appreciated, nor closely examined. Most Americans thought we had a serious corruption problem in 2010; now compare the top 5 most expensive US Senate elections in 2020 with those states in 2010 to see the scale and orders of magnitude of what is happening in American politics:

Senate Race Spending (Candidates and Outside Groups) 2010 vs 2020

Source: OpenSecrets.org



In 2020, donors poured \$2.1 billion into just nine Senate races, with the majority of them exceeding \$200 million per race.² As we documented in our previous report, [Under the Avalanche](#), the majority of the money flowed through national Super PACs, often controlled by the leaders of the Democratic and Republican parties and funded by an elite national group of wealthy donors. Both parties use secret “dark money” vehicles that make it impossible to document the sources of the money. And most of the money is spent to amplify national strategies of the partisans to confuse and divide voters, sometimes using the same actors in advertisements across several states.

Now, this pattern is already beginning to repeat in Pennsylvania. With control of the Senate split 50-50, this report will focus on how both the Republican and Democratic parties, and their donor interest partners, will deploy the full force of their fundraising machines in the contest for Pennsylvania’s open Senate seat.

What is a Super PAC?

Many of the groups that will spend millions of dollars in Pennsylvania are organizations known as “Super PACs” (Political Action Committees). Super PACs are a type of political organization enabled by several Supreme Court decisions that eliminated longstanding state and federal anti-corruption rules about how much people and organizations could donate or spend to influence election outcomes. As a result, Super PACs have no limit on how much money they can raise or how much they can spend on advertising. Although Super PACs are technically prohibited from coordinating directly with campaigns, they are often staffed by high-level party operatives with deep connections to candidates and elected officials, and campaigns can publicly make available materials and messaging they want allied Super PACs to use.³

Super PACs have allowed wealthy donors to deploy staggering amounts of money to influence

elections; in the 2020 election cycle Super PACs raised almost \$3.5 billion nationally.⁴ Some of the donors expected to be involved in the 2022 election include: Miriam Adelson, the widow of Republican mega donor and casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, who, along with his wife, gave over \$218 million to conservative candidates and spending groups in 2020,⁵ Tom Steyer, the billionaire hedge fund manager who spent \$342 million on his own campaign and another \$73 million on other liberal causes in 2020,⁶ and George Soros, the billionaire Democratic donor whose Democracy PAC gave \$80 million to Democratic candidates and groups in 2020 and who has already given \$125 million to Democracy PAC for 2022 and beyond.⁷

In addition to funding Super PACs, donors also give funds directly to committees established by the political parties. Current regulations permit individual donors to give almost half a million dollars to a committee per election cycle, and there are separate committees for both the House and the Senate for each party, enabling donors to give almost a million dollars to a party every two years.⁸ Pennsylvania has no limits on the amounts of money that individuals, corporations, or unions can give to candidates or PACs, or on the amounts that PACs can give to candidates.⁹

In 2016, the previous election for Pat Toomey’s seat, big donors made up most of the \$170 million spent in the campaign, with \$120 million of that coming from Super PACs and outside groups seeking influence in the race. The two largest spenders were the Senate Majority PAC, controlled by the Democratic Party and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, which spent over \$19 million, and the Senate Leadership Fund, controlled by the Republican Party and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, which spent over \$15 million.¹⁰

That election was the most expensive Senate election of 2016, and the only Senate race to exceed \$150 million in total. In the years since,

election spending has risen to even higher levels. In 2020, the top 7 most expensive Senate races exceeded over \$200 million in spending, with the most expensive, the special election in Georgia, reaching over \$500 million.¹¹ With election spending levels at an all-time high, and Pennsylvania already breaking spending records months before the election, we can expect that the same outside spending groups that were active in 2016 will pour hundreds of millions of dollars into the state.

Who Will Spend Big in Pennsylvania?

We can predict with near certainty many of the groups that will spend millions of dollars in the general election to promote their national agenda. One of the largest spending groups in the country is the Senate Leadership Fund, a Super PAC that spent over \$476 million in support of Republican Senate candidates nationwide in 2019 and 2020.¹² It is headed by members of the Republican establishment: the president of the Senate Leadership Fund is Steven Law, the former chief of staff for Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell,¹³ and the group's board of directors includes Mike Duncan, the former chair of the Republican National Committee.¹⁴ Duncan's fellow director Phil Cox is one of the nation's most prominent Republican strategists, and was called "a force for the GOP" by the Boston Globe.¹⁵ The Senate Leadership Fund is one of the primary Super PACs that support Republican candidates for Senate, and will almost certainly be involved in a contested Senate election like Pennsylvania's in 2022.

The Democratic counterpart to the Senate Leadership Fund, the Senate Majority PAC, is another massive Super PAC that influences Senate races nationwide, and is heavily

connected to Democratic leadership and staff. The Senate Majority PAC spent over \$372 million in 2019 and 2020. The group is headed by top Democratic strategist J. B. Poersch, the former executive director of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee and a "confidant" of Senator Chuck Schumer.¹⁶ Treasurer Rebecca Lambe and Director Susan McCue both served on the staff of former Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid.^{17,18}

In addition to these Super PACs, the Senate committees for each party can be expected to participate in this election. The National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC) and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC) spent over \$331 million¹⁹ and \$303 million,²⁰ respectively, in 2019 and 2020. Although they are not Super PACs, and are therefore subject to slightly more regulations on how they can raise money, these organizations exist for the sole purpose of spending millions of dollars to elect senators of their party.

These major party organizations, which can each deploy tens of millions of dollars to run ads in a given state, will almost certainly be involved in Pennsylvania. They are not, however, the only outside spending groups that will descend upon Pennsylvania in the coming year. Many other groups, although not as explicitly connected to one of the two major parties, exist to spend millions on political advertisements.

One such organization, another major Super PAC of 2020, that has already signaled its intention to get involved in a number of 2022 elections, is the anti-Trump organization The Lincoln Project.²¹ Established in 2019 by a number of former Republican strategists, the stated purpose of The Lincoln Project was to oppose Donald Trump's re-election campaign, particularly by persuading Republicans to vote against him. The mission of the organization expanded to targeting seven Senate seats in 2020. The Lincoln Project has continued its operations even after the defeat of Donald Trump in 2020,

continuing to oppose Republican candidates and officeholders. The Lincoln Project spent almost \$82 million in 2019 and 2020, the first election cycle of its operation. Despite being an organization intended to persuade Republican voters with Republican values and messages, some of the largest donors to The Lincoln Project were billionaires who often spend heavily in support of the Democratic Party.

Who's Paying For This?

Most of the groups previously mentioned do not raise their millions of dollars in the states where they will be spent. Instead, they raise their funds nationally, often from large individual donors and organizations that can easily afford to give millions of dollars.

Democratic-Backing Groups

The Democrat's Senate Majority PAC raised a significant portion of its funds from large donors in 2020. Over 85% of the total money raised by this Super PAC came from just 394 donors who contributed \$25,000 or more. 58 donors gave more than \$1 million each, making up just under 67% of the total. Four donors – three dark money 501(c)(4) groups and one other Super PAC – contributed over \$10 million each.²² Of the contributions for which SMP reported a location, over 36% of their funds came from Washington DC, over 17% came from California, and over 16% came from New York. Less than 0.5% of their funds from itemized contributions came from PA.²³

The largest donor to the Senate Majority PAC is not an individual at all, but rather the “dark money” group Majority Forward, which gave \$47.8 million to SMP.²⁴ Unfortunately, due to Majority Forward's status as a nonprofit “social welfare organization,” it is not required to disclose its donors, giving rise to the term “dark money.” This sort of arrangement, in which money is funneled through groups like Majority

AT A GLANCE: DEMOCRAT SUPER PAC AND MEGADONOR SPENDING



**\$372 Million in 2020
Elections**

Senate Majority PAC
Super PAC



**\$82 Million in 2020
Elections**

The Lincoln Project
Super PAC



**\$40 Million in 2018 from
UNKNOWN Donors**

Majority Forward
Super PAC



**\$205 Million Combined
from 2020-22**

George Soros
NY Billionaire



**\$1 Million to The Lincoln
Project in 2020**

Gordon Getty
CA Billionaire



**\$1 Million to The Lincoln
Project in 2020**

Stephen Frank Mandel Jr
CT Billionaire



**\$415 Million Spent
in 2020**

Tom Steyer
NY Billionaire

Forward, allows Super PACs like the Senate Majority PAC to get around the requirement that they disclose their donors. SMP only has to report that they received funding from Majority Forward, with no record of where Majority Forward got the money in the first place.

Some information about Majority Forward's donors is available, however, from donors who disclosed their donations. Previously, in 2016, it received \$1.5 million from The Advocacy Fund, a liberal lobbying group, \$500,000 from the NEO Philanthropy Action Fund, a group that promotes social justice movements, and \$250,000 from the CVS Health Corporation in 2017 or early 2018.²⁵ In 2020, it received another \$1.75 million from the CVS Health Corporation, which also owns Aetna health insurance and lobbies and advertises extensively in opposition to single-payer healthcare.²⁶

The Lincoln Project, a group founded to oppose President Donald Trump's reelection campaign in 2020 that has expanded to opposing pro-Trump Republican candidates generally, raised over \$87 million in the 2020 cycle. Less than 3% of The Lincoln Project's funds raised came from Pennsylvania, however, with over half its funds coming from California, Florida,

New York, Massachusetts, and Texas. Receipts from California in particular made up almost a quarter of their funds, with TLP receiving almost \$13 million from donors in the state – over 24% of its reported receipts. It also received \$1.35 million from Majority Forward, the “dark money” group discussed previously.

One of The Lincoln Project's largest individual donors was Stephen Frank Mandel Jr., a Connecticut billionaire and hedge fund manager, the 299th richest person in the US,²⁷ and a significant donor to Democratic causes who gave \$1 million to TLP. Mandel has previously used his financial strength to exert political influence in his own state. In 2011, the billionaire backed an attempted illegal state takeover of the Bridgeport, CT school board, through his ZOOM foundation,²⁸ as well as funding a “pipeline”²⁹ of policy fellows to the office of CT governor Dannel Malloy, who proposed millions in state funding for charter schools, Mandel's pet issue.³⁰

Another major funder of The Lincoln Project is Gordon Getty, heir to the Getty Oil Company fortune and 391st richest person in the US,³¹ who gave \$1 million to TLP. Getty is another prolific Democratic donor, who is known for his ties to CA governor Gavin Newsom, to whom he has given significant personal and political financial support.³² Getty has ties to a number of other prominent California Democrats, including Nancy Pelosi and Diane Feinstein, who attended the billionaire's lavish 85th birthday party,³³ and Kamala Harris, for whom Getty hosted a \$28,000-a-plate fundraiser in 2019.³⁴ In November 2021, Nancy Pelosi officiated the wedding of Getty's granddaughter.³⁵

The Lincoln Project founders funneled more than \$27 million of its funds raised towards Summit Strategic Communications, the consulting firm owned by co-founder Reed Galen, using the funds to pay themselves. According to the New York Times, this practice of transmitting campaign funds through intermediaries “can

“Enough is enough. For too long we have allowed corporations and special interests to dilute the power of our representative democracy. Now is the time for Pennsylvanians, and all Americans, to stand up to enact appropriate limits on campaign spending to restore the trust and voices of the American people.”



Kyle A. Darby, Political Strategist,
Philadelphia, PA

violate campaign finance laws, but it is unclear whether the Lincoln Project crossed that line.”³⁶

Republican-Backing Groups

In 2020, the Senate Leadership Fund primarily raised money from Nevada, Illinois, and New York. Over 20% of the SLF’s reported contributions came from Nevada, almost \$83 million, over 15% came from Illinois, almost \$64 million, and almost 14% came from New York, almost \$57 million. Less than half a percent of its reported contributions came from Pennsylvania. Over 99% of the total money raised by this Super PAC came from just 339 donors who contributed \$25,000 or more. 60 donors gave more than \$1 million each, making up just under 90% of the total. Only one of these donors came from Pennsylvania. Thomas Tull, former CEO of Legendary Entertainment and owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers gave \$1.25 million to the SLF in 2020.³⁷ Six donors – one 501(c)(4) and five ultra-wealthy individuals – contributed at least \$30 million each.

The single largest source of funding for the Senate Leadership Fund came from One Nation, another dark money group claiming to be a “social welfare” organization under a 501(c)(4) classification that refuses to disclose its donors. One Nation provided \$62.6 million to the Senate Leadership Fund,³⁸ and the source of the vast majority of that money is unknown.

Nonetheless, we can gain a rough picture of One Nation’s donors through those who have voluntarily disclosed their donations to the group – the oil company Tesoro donated \$1 million in both 2016 and 2017, and the American Health Care Association donated \$200,000 in 2016.³⁹ One Nation is also required to disclose the groups to which it makes grants; in 2018 it gave \$1.6 million to the pro-life Susan B. Anthony List, and \$1 million to the right-leaning American Economic Freedom Alliance.⁴⁰ One Nation “shares staff and offices”

AT A GLANCE:

REPUBLICAN SUPER PAC AND MEGADONOR SPENDING



UNKNOWN Amount of Dark Money Spent

One Nation
Super PAC



\$475 Million in 2020 Elections

Senate Leadership Fund
Super PAC



\$1.2 Million to Senate Leadership Fund in 2020

Thomas Tull
PA Billionaire



\$35 Million to Senate Leadership Fund in 2020

Stephen Schwarzman
NY Billionaire



\$5 Million to Dave McCormick’s PAC

Kenneth Griffin
IL Billionaire

with the Senate Leadership Fund,⁴¹ and other staffing choices provide further insights. One Nation Chairman Bobby Burchfield is a partner at the law firm McDermott Will & Emery LLP, and has represented corporate clients including Exxon, E.I. duPont de Nemours and the American Automobile Association.⁴² One Nation Board member Ken Cole is a former lobbyist at General Motors, Honeywell, and Pfizer,⁴³ and fellow board member Sally Vastola is the former executive director and CEO of the National Republican Campaign Committee.⁴⁴ While these bits and pieces of information provide compelling suggestions, we cannot provide a clearer picture because One Nation conceals its donors.

Another billionaire who wields political influence through contributions to the Senate Leadership Fund is Stephen Schwarzman, who gave a total of \$35 million to the Super PAC.⁴⁵ The chairman, CEO, and co-founder of the investment group Blackstone resides in New York City, and has a net worth of \$22.4 billion.⁴⁶ He was the largest individual donor on Wall Street in the 2020 elections.⁴⁷

Following \$5 million in contributions supporting Republicans in 2016, President Trump named Schwarzman as chair of the President's Strategic and Policy Forum in 2017, and to the Great American Economic Revival Industry Groups formed during the coronavirus pandemic.⁴⁸ The Washington Post has called him an "unofficial ambassador" to China, and credited him with softening President Trump's stance on Chinese trade.⁴⁹ Schwarzman's influence goes beyond economic policy; he also reportedly counseled the former president towards the decision to eliminate DACA.⁵⁰ At Blackstone, Schwarzman has a clear interest in the policies that he is working in the White House to institute. He would have felt the effects of President Obama's proposed elimination of the carried interest tax loophole (which he notoriously compared to Hitler's invasion of Poland),⁵¹ and he called the 2017 Republican tax cuts "a game changer."⁵²

Nonetheless, he maintains that he is working in the interests of the American people: "I have objectives I think are worthy for all people, and everybody should benefit in that."⁵³

These outside spending groups are already well into their fundraising operations for 2022. The Senate Majority PAC has already raised over \$84 million, \$14.3 million of that from its dark money funder, Majority Forward.⁵⁴ The Senate Leadership Fund, the Republican counterpart to Senate Majority PAC, has already raised over \$75 million, with \$15.5 million of that coming from One Nation, its dark money group.⁵⁵

"Viable" Candidates Must be This Wealthy to Run

Democrats

Lt. Governor John Fetterman, the winner of the Democratic primary, raised over \$16 million since the start of his Senate campaign.⁵⁶ He has raised a significant amount of money from organized labor, a major source of funding for his previous campaigns as well.⁵⁷ A major donor to Fetterman is the DC-based progressive When Democrats Turn Out PAC. The Fetterman campaign reported a \$10,000 donation from the PAC on March 30th, 2021, over the legal donation limit. The campaign also reported that it refunded \$5,000 of the donation on the same day, March 30th.⁵⁸ Receiving and then immediately refunding campaign contributions over the legal limit is a common tactic among campaigns to create the appearance of higher fundraising totals ahead of reporting deadlines.

Representative Conor Lamb (D-17) raised over \$6.9 million for his campaign. 53% of the

money Lamb raised comes from donations of \$2000 or greater, while small-dollar donations of \$200 or less make up only about 16%.⁵⁹ Since his first congressional election in 2018, Lamb has received a significant amount of funding, over \$100,000, from employees of PNC Bank, at which Lamb's father is a senior executive and lobbyist. Over \$28,000 of that came from Lamb's father himself.⁶⁰ Less than 23% of Lamb's itemized contributions came from Pennsylvania, and he reported almost double the amount of funding

and Democratic donor, and the Sheetmetal Workers Union.⁶³

According to Carville, Lamb appeared on fundraising calls for the PAC, which is legal despite rules prohibiting coordination between campaigns and PACs, as long as Lamb did not directly solicit donations and left the call before the PAC's leader discussed its strategy. Carville, who considers Lamb a friend and knew his grandfather in the 70s, claimed that the PAC was established in part to counter Lt. Governor John Fetterman's fundraising advantage in the race.⁶⁴

The third major Democratic candidate, State Senator Malcom Kenyatta, raised over \$1.9 million,⁶⁵ although almost 72% of his funds came from outside Pennsylvania.⁶⁶ Similar to Fetterman, Kenyatta received a \$10,000 donation from the progressive New York-based Working Families Party National PAC, of which he immediately refunded half.⁶⁷

Beginning in April 2021, 20 months before the election, The Collective Super PAC, a Washington DC-based PAC that has endorsed Kenyatta, spent \$110,00 on an ad campaign attacking John Fetterman.⁶⁸ The Collective Super PAC raised over \$2.2 million in 2020, raising their funds almost entirely from donations over \$2000, including \$300,000 from New York billionaire Michael Bloomberg. It has not reported any donations from PA in the 2020 or 2022 election cycles.⁶⁹

The fundraising totals in this primary demonstrate how essential it is for candidates to fundraise to even try to compete in modern elections. In the Democratic primary, the candidate with the most money won, the candidate with the second-most funds came in second in the election, and the distant third in fundraising came in third. When Fetterman pulled ahead in fundraising thanks to his support from labor and his access to donors from all over the US, Lamb had to pull in



“Dark money has clouded our elections. **It is increasingly difficult for citizen legislators to enter the process** -- a far cry from what our Founders intended.”

Jennifer Mann, President, J Mann Consulting LLC
& Former PA State Representative

from Massachusetts than from Pennsylvania. One of Lamb's largest donors was Connecticut billionaire and hedge fund manager Stephen Frank Mandel Jr., the previously mentioned Lincoln Project megadonor and his wife, Sue Mandel. Both Mandel and his wife made the maximum allowable donation to Lamb's campaign.⁶¹

In early February, major Democratic donors in Pennsylvania received emails from Democratic strategist James Carville, promoting a new “Penn Progress” PAC intended to support Lamb in the primary. Although Penn Progress only reported raising \$2.3 million ahead of the primary,⁶² fundraising emails for the PAC had put forward a plan to spend \$8 million on ads promoting Lamb. Major donors to the PAC included Steve Cozen, a prominent Philadelphia-based lawyer

support from a national Democratic strategist and his Super PAC to try and match that. For most people, \$2 million would be an absolutely incredible amount of money. But for Malcom Kenyatta's campaign, it was nowhere near enough compared to the other candidates.

Republicans

The Republican primary was dominated by wealthy candidates self-funding their campaign. The prevalence of wealthy, self-funded candidates raises questions on the viability of candidates who are not able to independently produce millions of dollars to compete on the airwaves. If being a millionaire or billionaire becomes a requirement for running for office, then the pool of candidates becomes much less representative of the average American.

As Sarah Bryner, a strategist at OpenSecrets, put it, even if a self-funded candidate doesn't ultimately win, they can crowd out less wealthy candidates by flooding the airwaves with ads and driving up the minimum price necessary to compete.⁷⁰ By 2020, over half of all members of Congress were millionaires.⁷¹ That ratio is already unrepresentative of Americans, and could become even more skewed if personal wealth becomes a requirement to successfully

run for Congress.

TV host Dr. Mehmet Oz, the winner of the Republican primary, reported raising over \$15 million, with \$12 million of that coming from personal loans to his own campaign,⁷² and he put that money to work. From November 2021 to February 2022, Oz had purchased more than \$5 million worth of ad time, more than the 2016 Democratic nominee spent on her entire primary campaign.⁷³ By the end of April 2022, Oz's campaign had spent more than \$14 million. Oz is also supported by the American Leadership Action PAC, which raised over \$4 million and funded many ads against David McCormick, another Republican candidate.⁷⁴

The main competitors to Oz were Carla Sands, the wealthy former CEO of the investment firm Vintage Capital, conservative commentator Kathy Barnette, and David McCormick, a former hedge fund manager and Army veteran who lives in Connecticut. Sands had raised over \$4.6 million, with \$3.9 million of that coming from personal loans to her own campaign.⁷⁵ Barnette raised \$1.7 million, and McCormick raised \$11 million, of which about \$7 million came from personal loans.⁷⁶ Because he only declared his candidacy in January 2022, McCormick didn't have to file any campaign finance reports until April, about a month before the primary



“As someone involved at the nexus of the business community and government for many years, I know how important it is to be able to advocate for a cause and we should do everything in our power to protect that right. **But when out-of-state billionaires, foreign interests and others can dump tens of millions of dollars into a so-called “super PAC” to influence an election and ensure that their preferred candidate wins, how are we average Pennsylvanians supposed to make our voices heard?** We have a system now that favors rich, out-of-state, out of country special interests to the peril of our own citizens.”

Dave Black, the retired President & CEO of the Harrisburg Regional Chamber & CREDC,
Mechanicsburg, PA

election, while still being able to run ads.⁷⁷

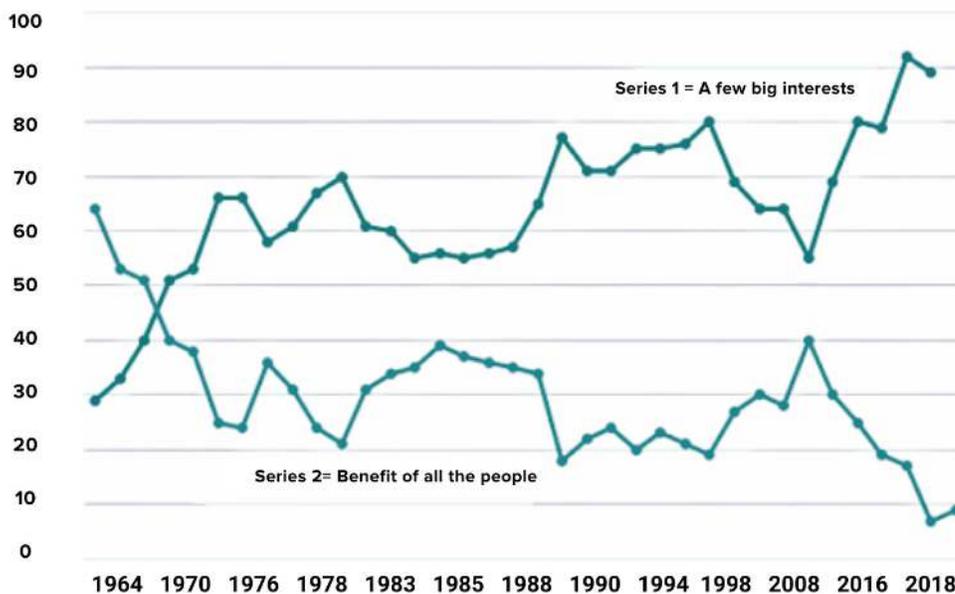
Barnette was boosted in the days before the primary by the conservative Super PAC Club For Growth, which spent at least \$2 million on tv ads in support of her.⁷⁸ The Club for Growth is a massive Super PAC, which raised more than \$70 million in 2020. Although Barnette did not win the primary, the ability of a PAC like the Club for Growth to appear at the last moment and deploy millions of dollars could very well have turned the race.

McCormick was backed by Honor Pennsylvania Inc. PAC, which raised over \$18 million, including \$7.5 million in donations from Kenneth Griffin, founder and CEO of Citadel, one of the largest hedge funds in the world and Citadel Securities, which handles 40% of stock trades in the United States.⁷⁹

The Impact on Pennsylvania Voters

Overwhelming money in our elections is reducing Americans' trust in our government. Only 2% of Americans trust the government to do what is right "just about always," and only 22% trust the government to do what's right "most of the time."⁸⁰ 67% of Americans think that the phrase "most politicians are corrupt" describes our country.⁸¹ People recognize that the big interests like corporations and wealthy donors that fund candidates and PACs are able to exercise significant influence in our government. Almost 90% of Americans believe that the government is run for these big interests rather than for the American people, and for good reason. A Princeton study published in 2014 backs up this belief, as it found that

Percent of Americans Who Believe Government is Run for a Few Big Interests versus the Benefit of All Americans



Data: American National Election Survey through Pew Research Center

“average citizens and mass-based interest groups have little or no independent influence” on US government policy.⁸² When money is the most important thing for running a successful campaign, then candidates and elected officials are forced to prioritize fundraising and appeasing their donors over their constituents.

The Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship, a two-year project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, found that a healthy constitutional democracy depends on responsive political institutions that “foster a healthy civic culture of participation and responsibility.”⁸³ Instead, we have political institutions that are distrusted and disliked by the American public, but can rely on money from wealthy donors, corporations, and outside interests to support themselves.

By looking at the pattern of how outside spending groups have buried other states in money and advertisements, we can see how these expensive elections lead to reduced trust and representation in government. In primary elections, groups are able to spend millions of dollars without having to disclose who they are until after the election, enabling a party to influence the other party’s election and promote a candidate they see as worse or as an easier opponent. This can erode trust, as people don’t even know who’s blasting them with messaging. Even after it becomes clear which party is paying for an ad, dark money groups that don’t have to disclose their donors enable wealthy donors to promote issues and candidates they prefer without accountability.

As mentioned earlier, when several candidates in a race are wealthy, self-funded candidates, they raise the financial floor required for a candidate to compete and have their voice heard, even if the self-funder has little chance of actually winning the election. When the financial floor to compete is raised, candidates who aren’t personally wealthy are forced to turn to large donors to raise the money they need to

“Powerful out-of-state special interest groups **weaken the voice of Pennsylvania voters by spending millions of dollars to gain an outsized influence on policy and legislation.**



Pennsylvanians can take this opportunity to lead in the fight to get this questionable money out of politics.”

Mark Schweiker, Former Governor of Pennsylvania, *Levittown, PA*

compete. These large donors are rarely giving to candidates out of pure charity, but expect the candidates they support to promote their interests. People know how this system works, and that is why they believe the government is run for the big interests whose support elected officials need.

When large outside spending groups come into a state, they rarely invest in learning what the most important issues are to the people of a state and tailoring their ads and messages to those issues. Instead, they run repetitive, cookie-cutter campaigns that recycle the same national issues, and often the same ads, that they use in the rest of the nation. Since these large national groups are almost always the ones with the most money, they drown out anyone else trying to speak to local issues or solve the problems actually faced by local voters. Pennsylvanians understand how their voices are being silenced by these wealthy, out-of-state interests.

Distrust and Disinformation

Many of the ads run in the 2022 primary were found to be misleading or outright false. Analysis of ads placed by candidates of both parties found that they often distorted the truth

in their attempt to attack opposing candidates.

Analysis by local PA news station WGAL found that an ad placed by Georgia-based PAC The Conservative Fund attacked Dr. Mehmet Oz for supposedly being a spokesman for a California foundation, despite the fact that the foundation explicitly stated he had never been a spokesman for them.⁸⁴ Similarly, CNN found that claim to be misleading, but also found that the Oz campaign hit right back with a misleading claim about David McCormick's political contributions seven years ago.⁸⁵ An attack ad placed by McCormick's Honor Pennsylvania Inc. PAC made several misleading claims about Kathy Barnette, twisting her words and making her appear to hold positions she did not.⁸⁶

On the Democratic side of the primary, the trend of false ads Penn Progress, the super PAC supporting Rep. Conor Lamb, spent \$800,000 running a single ad that they were forced to pull the day it launched. The ad called Lt. Gov. John Fetterman "a self-described democratic socialist," but Fetterman has never described himself as such. The ad was rated false by multiple independent fact-checkers, was condemned by Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), and was taken off the air by a Philadelphia TV station.⁸⁷

Notably, none of these ads were focused on the issues that matter to the daily lives of Pennsylvanians. Instead, they were campaigns of partisan mud-slinging, in which candidates and their PACs twisted each other's words to attack them for failing partisan purity tests.

Distracting from Pennsylvanian Issues

As we move to the general election, national groups backed and run by party elites will begin to get more involved in Pennsylvania. Because many of the major spending groups that get involved in Senate elections are national groups, they tend to copy-paste their ads across states

and run the same campaign in every state. This leads to campaigns that don't focus on the most relevant issues for the voters in a state, but rather on whatever issues the national groups think are most important or most likely to motivate voters. Based on the campaigns run in 2020, we can get a fairly accurate picture of what Pennsylvanians can expect to see in the rest of 2022.

The playbook for Republican-aligned spending groups is to paint the opposing candidate as a radical liberal who is backed by D.C. Democrats, one who wants to impose a far-left agenda on the state. The Senate Leadership Fund ran this play [again and again and again](#) in 2020, bombarding people across America with the same message. In some cases, the Senate Leadership Fund used the same actress for attack ads in separate states.



The same woman appears in SLF ads for [Maine](#) and [Iowa](#), as well as an ad placed by American Crossroads, another Republican Super PAC, in [Kansas](#). All three ads present the actor as a voter in the state who appears to be concerned about the Democratic candidate. In the ads placed in Iowa and Kansas, she recites almost the same script, attacking the “Greenfield-Pelosi Healthcare Plan” in Iowa and the “Bollier-Pelosi Healthcare Plan” in Kansas (Theresa Greenfield and Barbra Bollier were the Democratic candidates for Senate in IA and KS, respectively.)

The Democratic groups similarly recycle the same issues and ads in state after state. They consistently harp on claims that an opponent voted to remove health insurance protections for people with pre-existing conditions. They have their preferred message locked down, and [ads broadcast in six different states](#) in 2020 repeat the phrase “X voted N times to eliminate

Ads placed by outside spending groups are also overwhelmingly negative. When they report their spending in a given election, they are required to disclose how much they have spent opposing or supporting a given candidate. Outside spending groups tend to spend the vast majority of their funds on ads that seek to oppose and attack a candidate, rather than building a constructive case for their favored candidate. In the 5 most expensive Senate elections in 2020, over 80% of the money spent by outside spending groups, totaling over \$635 million, was spent in opposition to a candidate.⁸⁸ This negativity ends up bringing down the level of discourse in the election and distracts from the real issues affecting voters.

In addition to introducing negativity and distracting from issues, many of the ads placed by outside spending groups play on falsehoods or misleading information. In Alaska, [ads](#) placed by the Senate Leadership Fund use a deceptively edited clip of Independent candidate Al Gross, which is presented as unearthed secret footage of Gross claiming to be a hypocrite for profiting off the healthcare system as a doctor. They are in fact taken from a public nonpartisan policy forum at which Gross spoke in 2019, in which he criticizes the healthcare system in his state.⁸⁹ In North Carolina, an [ad](#) placed by the Senate Majority PAC claimed that Thom Tillis cut education funding by \$500 million while Speaker of the House in NC. In fact, during his tenure as state Speaker, North Carolina’s education budget actually *increased* by \$660 million (the number used in the ad comes from the fact that the education budget passed was \$500 million smaller than recommended).⁹⁰

“The excessive amount of money required to run for office, not only **destroys the incentive structure of service, but it also prohibits our elected officials** from doing their jobs and making the compromises required for legislating and governing.”



Maia Comeau, Carlisle, PA

protections for pre-existing conditions” in some form or another.

Regardless of what the actual issues facing Pennsylvanians, regardless of what candidates or voters might want to talk about, substantive discussion will be drowned out by the same repetitive messages that outside groups recycle in every election.

The barrage of negativity that comes with outside spending in an election doesn’t just make the election campaign miserable for the people subjected to endless attack ads (although that alone should be reason enough to regulate outside spending groups). It also has long-term damaging effects on our democracy. When voters are subjected to an overwhelming amount

of attack ads, many of which are based on misleading information or outright falsehoods, it becomes difficult to tell what is and is not true. Voters are more likely to check out of the election and dismiss all candidates as awful, or to assume that nothing they're hearing is true. Even after the election, when one candidate has managed to wade through the muck and win, voters will remember all the attacks levied against them during the campaign, and be much less likely to trust their new representative as a result of the false information. Research has shown that negative ads convince people to stay home and not vote, further reducing already-low rates of participation in our elections.⁹¹

PA Voters are Ready for Reform

Pennsylvanian voters are ready to reform our broken election system and restore an American democracy where We The People govern, not

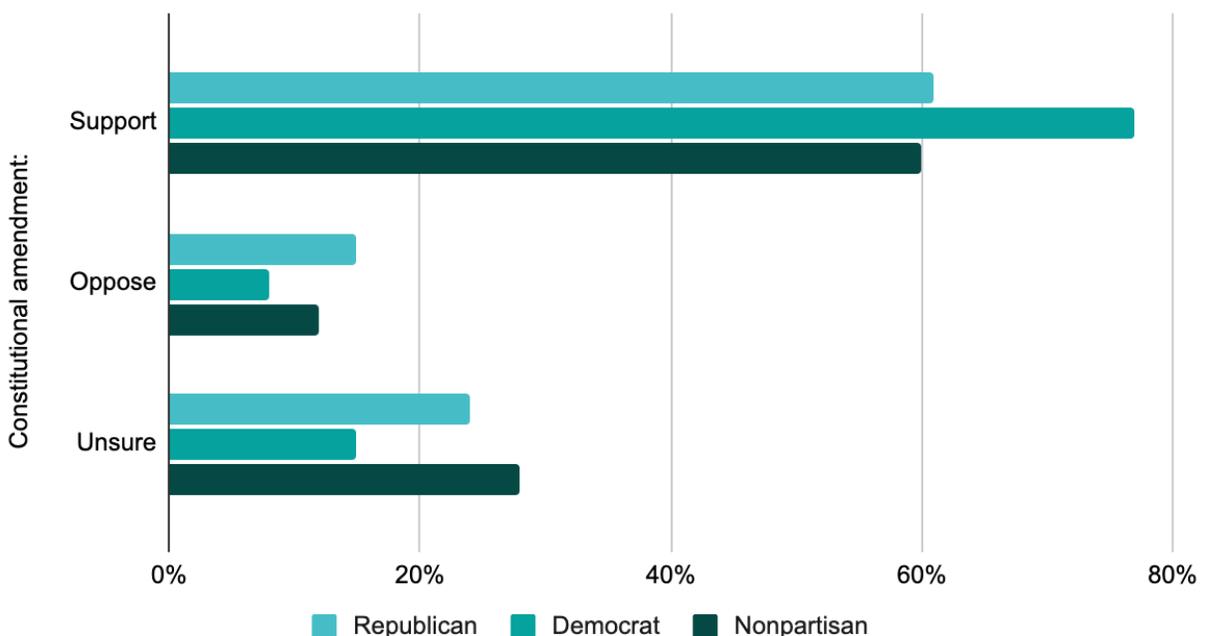
big corporations, unions, and wealthy special interests.

Most Pennsylvanians, of all political stripes, recognize the importance of reform to end the influence of money in politics. A recent survey by Citizen Data found that over 70% of Pennsylvanians think big donors have too much political influence. The survey found strong, cross-partisan support for a number of proposed reforms to solve this problem.

Most notable is the supermajority, cross-partisan support for a constitutional amendment to limit the influence of money in politics. 65% of Pennsylvania voters, including both parties and independents, “express support for an amendment to the constitution which would allow Congress and state legislatures to enact stronger reforms to political contributions and spending in both state and federal elections.” Pennsylvanians from all walks of life are already standing up to demand change.

As Pennsylvanians organize and demand change, they are building an important part of the national movement to pass and ratify the For Our Freedom Amendment. Leading the fight

Support for Constitutional Amendment by Party



nationwide is [American Promise](#), a national nonpartisan organization uniting Americans to ratify a constitutional amendment to enable reforms on the power of money in elections, and ensure representation and effective self-government for all Americans. 22 states have already called for the passage of the For Our Freedom Amendment, and Pennsylvanians are working to make their state the 23rd. This is a

national, fast-growing movement, and no other political cause enjoys this much cross-partisan, supermajority support.⁹²

When our national movement succeeds, with the critical help of Pennsylvanian voters, the For Our Freedom amendment will return sovereignty to PA and allow voters to decide how they want to regulate spending and influence in their elections.

Conclusion

This report details the most likely scenario for what Pennsylvanians can expect in the rest of 2022 as millions of dollars in outside money pours into their state. Already, the candidates who even had a chance were effectively pre-selected by the simple fact of how much money they had access to for their campaigns. The fact that we can predict in advance what groups will be most involved in our elections, where their funding will come from, what ads they will run, and what issues will receive the most attention, is a testament to how dire the state of our elections is. But it does not have to be this way.

In a world where the power of money over democracy is reasonably limited, elections would become more respectful, more open, and more representative of the people. They would be contested by a wide range of candidates with diverse ideas. Campaigns would be funded through small donations by people from all walks of life. All contributions would be disclosed, so voters would know the origins of campaign money. The airwaves would be open to robust debate and sharing of ideas between those actually impacted by an election's outcome. Candidates would engage in dialogue with voters, rather than "call-time" and fundraisers with wealthy donors. Elected officials would



"We believe in a strong democracy where government is accountable to the people it serves. We believe in a strong economy where companies compete based on the value they create in the marketplace. **We believe in a political system based on checks and balances and an open exchange of ideas.**"

Bill Buck, Business leader, part-owner, Philadelphia Phillies,
Philadelphia, PA

work to win the approval of their constituents, not of moneyed interests in New York, Palm Beach, Chicago, and other cities where wealth is concentrated. Elections would focus on the issues that matter to their constituents, not “wedge issues” intended by national groups to drive people apart and push down the level of discourse. Every election would not have to be an exhausting barrage of the same negative ads over and over again, copied from state to state.

This vision is within reach, but the Supreme Court has blocked every effort to move towards it with the controversial legal theory that money is “free speech.” Although the Supreme Court is able to overturn reasonable regulations passed by states, giving wealthy donors and corporations a massive amount of influence in our elections, the power in our democracy still ultimately rests with the people. Enshrined in our Constitution is the right to amend it, the right of the American people to balance the power of the Supreme Court and correct distorted interpretations of the law. Passing and ratifying a constitutional amendment is not easy, but in times of crisis like these, where our democracy and rights to self-government are being drowned in a sea of money, it is essential.

Every Pennsylvanian, regardless of political party or independence, can join the thousands of citizens working together across the state to put Pennsylvania first, and end the domination of outside money in our elections.



American Promise members have launched a movement that is working to build support for the For Our Freedom Amendment and put the power back in the hands of American voters.

Join us at ForOurFreedomPA.com

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