

# UNDER THE AVALANCHE:

MAINE'S \$200 MILLION SENATE RACE



AMERICAN PROMISE

STAND WITH **MAINE**

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# INTRODUCTION

No Maine voter needs reminding that our most recent Senate race was the most expensive – and quite possibly the nastiest – in the state’s history. The intense partisanship, negative and divisive attacks belied Maine’s tradition of bucking national fault lines, and of electing independent-minded leaders more free of party bosses or moneyed interests. So how did Maine, a fiercely proud and free-thinking state, come to be embroiled in the same partisan warfare which has come to characterize politics in Washington and around the country?

**“We were 20 feet under snow in an avalanche, and no one could hear us.”**



- David Trahan, former Republican State Senator and Executive Director of the Maine Sportsman’s Alliance

This report from Maine’s chapter of the national, non-partisan organization, American Promise, seeks to shine a light into some of that \$200 million that poured into the avalanche of often misleading, toxic and divisive campaign advertising in the state.<sup>1</sup> With a focus on the largest spenders on both the Republican side

and the Democratic side, we seek to offer Mainers clear, fair information about how the money degrades debate, decreases useful information, smothers the voices of voters and of more independent candidates – the opposite of what free speech under the First Amendment is all about.

## THE MAINE MILLIONS REPORT DREW THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS:

**Almost all of the money in the race came through Super PACs.**

**The Super PACs in the Maine election are closely entwined with the national Republican and Democratic Senate leadership and political operatives in Washington, D.C.**

**A majority of the money that flowed in the Maine election came from wealthy donors and interests outside of Maine.**

**Outside money funded negative attacks and disinformation.**

**All this money restricted free speech, voter information and choice.**

**Mainers support a Constitutional amendment to end big money in politics.**

# WHAT OUR EXAMINATION OF THE 2020 ELECTION SPENDING IN MAINE REVEALED:

## **In Maine, Super PACs Provide the Majority of the Money.**

Most of the money spent in the 2020 Senate race in Maine did not come through the candidates' campaigns but through "Super PACs." A Super PAC is formed by those seeking to influence the election with money that does not go through the candidates' campaigns.

While campaign finance laws limit what an individual can contribute directly to a candidate's campaign, no limits apply to Super PACs since the Supreme Court struck down such limits in 2010. According to the Court, because such groups are "outside" of and "independent" of the campaigns, the Court (over strong dissents) maintained that limits on the money flowing through the Super PACs would violate the donors' right to free speech under the First Amendment.<sup>2</sup>

**In 2020, the Super PACs operating in Maine were closely entwined with the national Republican and Democratic Senate leadership**

**and Washington, D.C. political operatives.**

In this report, we examined two Super PACs: the Senate Majority Fund and the Senate Leadership Fund. The Senate Majority PAC, while ostensibly "independent," effectively is an arm of the Democratic Party and New York Senator Chuck Schumer, now Senate Majority Leader. 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.<sup>3</sup> Treasurer Rebecca Lambe and Director Susan McCue both served on the staff of former Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid.<sup>4,5</sup>

Similarly, the Senate Leadership Fund is not "independent" but effectively is an arm of the Republican Party and Kentucky Senator Mitch McConnell, now Senate Minority Leader. The Senate Leadership Fund spent over \$287 million to support Republicans in key Senate races.<sup>6</sup> Its president is Steven Law, the former chief of staff

for then-Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

## **Mainers are being left behind: Wealthy Donors and Interests Outside of Maine Fund Super PACs.**

Most of the \$200 million in the Maine Senate race came from wealthy Republican and Democratic donors outside of Maine, fighting a national battle for control of the US Senate. The Senate Majority PAC and the Senate Leadership Fund spent, respectively, \$27.9 million and \$12.6 million on the 2020 Maine Senate race.<sup>7</sup> The largest donations to both Super PACs were from 501(c)(4) “dark money” groups, followed by donations from wealthy individuals located in Chicago, New York, Las Vegas, and Palm Beach. Not one of the 647 donations over \$100,000 to either group came from Maine.<sup>8</sup>

## **Super PACs Overwhelmingly Spend on Negative Attacks and Disinformation.**

Both Super PACs spent over 98% of their Maine budgets on attack ads, and less than two percent on ads supporting their favored candidate.<sup>9,10</sup> As a result, Mainers faced a heavily negative campaign landscape in which

ads concentrated on personal attacks and distorted voting records.

## **Super PAC Spending Restricts Free Speech, Voter Information and Choice.**

The high levels of spending ultimately reduced access to fact-based voter information, drowned out public debate, and stymied the goals of the ranked-choice voting system that Mainers worked hard to implement.

## **Mainers Support a Constitutional Amendment That Ends This Systemic Corruption of the American Political Process.**

In August 2020, a survey of Mainers by American Promise and Citizen Data showed three out four voters in favor of passing and ratifying an amendment to the US Constitution to enable Maine and the nation to have reasonable limits on contributions and spending in elections. Maine, in a 2013 vote of Republican, Democratic, and independent legislators called on Congress to pass such an amendment and return it to the states for ratification. Since then, 22 states have joined in this call, and the supermajority support shown by Mainers is shared by Americans

across the nation. The American Promise constitutional amendment would ensure elections where money came in much smaller amounts, from many more people. Voters, not big

and secretive donors, would be heard most, and candidates and elected representatives would spend time and solve problems with their constituents in their states and communities.

## **SUPER PAC CONTROLLED BY NEW YORK DEMOCRAT SPENDS MILLIONS IN MAINE**

The Senate Majority PAC is the largest left-leaning Super PAC in the country. At the time of writing, it has reported spending just under \$229 million on competitive Senate races nationwide, most heavily targeting Michigan, North Carolina, Iowa, Georgia, and Maine.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> Treasurer Rebecca Lambe and Director Susan McCue both served on the staff of former Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid.<sup>13,14</sup> Given these connections to the Democratic establishment, the notion that the Senate Majority PAC is “independent” of any candidate or party is misleading.

### **Outside Money Dominates Maine Elections**

Major donors to the group come from across the country – New York, Chicago, Palo Alto, West Palm Beach – but rarely from Maine.<sup>15</sup> Most of the money in the Senate Majority PAC comes from a small group of very large donors. 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.

While the Senate Majority PAC spent \$27.9 million in Maine in 2020, mostly on attack ads on Senator Collins, Mainers had virtually no say in the matter. Of the 394 donors who contributed more than \$25,000 to the Senate Majority PAC, just a single one was from Maine.<sup>16</sup> In total, less than

one-tenth of one percent of the group's funding came from Mainers.

Many of the donors to the Senate Majority PAC are not people at all. The largest donor is Majority Forward, the dark money group created for the purpose of funneling anonymous funds towards liberal causes – in this case, \$47.8 million to the Democrats' largest Super PAC.<sup>17</sup>

Majority Forward is a “social welfare” group governed by section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code, and is

not required to publicly disclose its donors; as such, the donations that it provides are commonly referred to as “dark money”. While such groups are ostensibly prohibited from participating in political campaigns, they can still exert tremendous influence on elections through donations to Super PACs. They can also run their own “issue ads” which are legal so long as they do not expressly advocate for or against a candidate. However, the [resulting ads](#) often appear nearly identical to typical attack ads (but notice that the linked video carefully shies away from suggesting that Senator Collins be voted out of office).

Although most of the donors to Majority Forward remain unknown, we can paint an (albeit incomplete) picture of the organization based on the few donors who have been disclosed, the organization's past disbursements, and its staff and leadership. Between 2016 and 2018, it received \$1.5 million from liberal 501(c)(4) group The Advocacy Fund, \$500,000 from the dark money Sixteen Thirty Fund, and \$250,000 from CVS Health.<sup>18</sup> Its most recent tax filings reveal that Majority Forward gave \$14.8 million to America Votes, \$10.1 million to the Black Progressive

### AT A GLANCE:

## DEMOCRAT SUPER PAC SPENDING IN 2020 ELECTIONS



**\$229 MILLION**  
Amount Spent Nationwide



**\$27.9 MILLION**  
Amount Spent In Maine



**1 MAINER**  
Number Of Maine Donors  
Who Contributed Over  
\$25,000



**\$27.4 MILLION**  
Amount Spent On Negative  
Ads And Disinformation In  
Maine

Action Coalition, and \$3.5 million to the League of Conservation Voters in 2018.<sup>19</sup> J.B. Poersch, Rebecca Lambe, and Susan McCue all serve on the organization's leadership;<sup>20</sup> this overlap in staffing with the Senate Majority PAC demonstrates the way in which Majority Forward acts as an arm of the Super PAC, allowing it to receive anonymous donations despite the FEC's requirement that all PACs disclose their donors.

James Simons tops the list of individual donors to the Senate Majority PAC, giving \$9.5 million to the group.<sup>21</sup> Simons is the now-retired founder of Renaissance Technologies, a New York-based hedge fund, and has a net worth of \$23.5 billion.<sup>22</sup>

Special interest groups also play a powerful role in Super PAC funding. A prominent example is the Greater New York Hospital Association (GNYHA), which donated \$8 million to the Senate Majority PAC.<sup>23</sup> GNYHA is officially a trade association, representing more than 160 New York hospitals and health systems. These member organizations pay dues, and in return, GNYHA lobbies aggressively on their behalf in Albany and in Washington.<sup>24</sup>

The group has a wide variety of

legislative priorities. Federally, GNYHA was part of a successful lobbying effort (along with a group of private equity firms) to defeat consumer protections against surprise medical billing.<sup>25</sup> According to a senior employee at the New York Department of Health, GNYHA has the power to “make or break an assemblyman's campaign in Albany” through its political spending. This spending, as well as spending in federal elections, has bought the group tremendous influence, such that “nothing really happens in Albany without Raske weighing in.”<sup>26</sup> The situation is similar in the nation's capital, where GNYHA has spent heavily to support congressional candidates, and has had direct access to top advisors in the White House.<sup>27</sup>

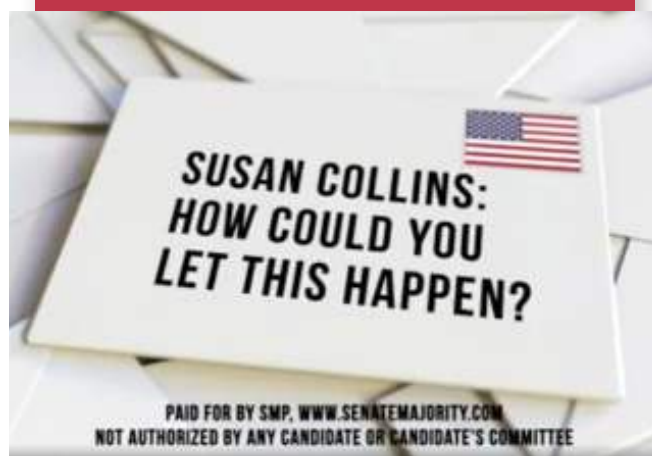
### **New York Democrat Controlled Super PAC Spends Millions in Maine on Attack Ads and Disinformation.**

In Maine, the Senate Majority PAC spent just under \$28 million of the money it received from dark money groups, trade associations, and wealthy individuals to attack Senator Susan Collins and help the candidacy of former Maine Speaker of the House, Sara Gideon. The vast majority (82%)



went towards broadcast advertising, and a smaller amount to targeted web ads.<sup>28</sup> As any Maine resident can attest to, the messaging was dominated by attack ads. Across both broadcast and web advertising, the group's spending was over 98% negative: the group spent \$27.4 million attacking Susan Collins, but just under \$500,000 supporting Sara Gideon.<sup>29</sup>

Three representative ads from the Senate Majority PAC [are linked here](#). The first ad criticizes Collins for a 2006 Postal Service bill that it says has crippled the agency. The second accuses her of working on behalf of wealthy donors and corporations, and endangering social security and Medicare through her vote for the 2017 Republican tax cuts. The third attacks her record of voting for conservative judges. Together, these and other ads distributed by the Senate Majority PAC construct a distorted image of Collins, painting her as a puppet of corporations and the GOP leadership. While none of the ads make outright false claims, they are all misleading: the Postal Service ad neglects to mention that Collins' bill received unanimous support in the Senate and was co-sponsored by Chuck Schumer.<sup>30</sup> The second ad leaves out that Collins acted to ensure that the tax cuts did not result in an immediate reduction



in Medicare,<sup>31</sup> and the third makes it sound as though she voted for Amy Coney Barrett's nomination to the Supreme Court.

This incessant negativity and deceit is a direct mark of spending by a group whose interest in Maine begins and ends with its Senate seats. There should thus be no surprise that voters felt as though they were caught between "national entities fighting a proxy battle through the Maine Senate race," as one American Promise Maine chapter member put it.

# SUPER PAC CONTROLLED BY KENTUCKY REPUBLICAN SPENDS MILLIONS IN MAINE

Like its Democratic counterpart, the Senate Leadership Fund was one of the most powerful forces in the 2020 elections, spending over \$287 million to support Republicans in key Senate races.<sup>32</sup> It is also 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,<sup>33</sup> and the group's board of directors includes Mike Duncan, the former chair of the Republican National Committee.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup>

## Outside Money Dominates Maine Elections

As with the Senate Majority PAC, its donors are concentrated in wealthy urban areas far from Maine. Most of the money in the Senate Leadership Fund comes from a small group of very large donors. 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. Six donors – one 501(c)(4) and five ultra-wealthy individuals – contributed at least \$30 million each.

While the Senate Leadership Fund spent \$12.6 million in Maine in 2020, very little of that money originated in Maine. Of the 339 donors who contributed more than \$25,000 to the Senate Leadership Fund, not a single one was from Maine. In total, just one-hundredth of one percent of the group's funding came from Mainers.

The single largest source of funding for the Senate Leadership Fund came from One Nation, a group claiming to be a "social welfare" organization under a "501(c)(4)" that refuses to disclose its donors. One Nation provided \$62.6 million to the Senate Leadership Fund,<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> One Nation “shares staff and offices” with the Senate Leadership Fund,<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> One Nation Board member Ken Cole is a former lobbyist at General Motors, Honeywell, and Pfizer,<sup>41</sup> and fellow board member Sally Vastola is the former executive director and CEO of the National Republican Campaign Committee.<sup>42</sup> While these bits and pieces of information provide compelling suggestions, we cannot provide a clearer picture because One Nation conceals its donors.

The single largest source of funding in the 2020 elections was one couple: Sheldon and Miriam Adelson, who together donated at least \$218 million to conservative candidates and outside groups,<sup>43</sup> including \$70 million to the Senate Leadership Fund.<sup>44</sup> Sheldon Adelson, who died in January 2021, was a lifelong entrepreneur whose fortune

## AT A GLANCE:

### REPUBLICAN SUPER PAC SPENDING IN 2020 ELECTIONS



**\$287 MILLION**

Amount Spent Nationwide



**\$12.6 MILLION**

Amount Spent In Maine



**0 MAINERS**

Number Of Maine Donors Who Contributed Over \$25,000



**\$12.5 MILLION**

Amount Spent On Negative Ads And Disinformation In Maine

largely originated from Las Vegas Sands, his worldwide chain of casinos and resorts. His wife, Miriam Adelson, is a doctor specializing in drug addiction, and the chair of drug abuse clinics in Las Vegas and Israel.<sup>45</sup>

Sheldon Adelson’s interests in influencing electoral politics increased along with his fortune – he lamented having to pay a greater share of his wealth in taxes than the average American, and was frequently embroiled in bitter disputes with union workers at his resorts. (In fact, the *New Yorker* reports that it was these labor disputes which pushed him to make his first conservative political

donations.)<sup>46</sup> Another major influence on Mr. Adelson's politics was his wife; it is widely acknowledged that Mrs. Adelson, who was born in Israel and runs a major Israeli newspaper, pushed her husband to become a more outspoken pro-Israel advocate.<sup>47</sup> Mr. Adelson lobbied successfully for the American embassy<sup>48</sup> in Israel to be moved to Jerusalem, and to assist the transition, he offered to partially fund the new embassy. The Adelsons also were large donors to entities that promoted the election of former President Donald Trump, spending a total of over \$20 million in 2016 and \$91 million in 2020.<sup>49</sup> In 2018, President Trump awarded Miriam Adelson the Presidential Medal of Freedom. The Medal is "presented to individuals who have made especially meritorious contributions to the security or national interests of the United States, to world peace, or to cultural or other significant public or private endeavors."<sup>50</sup>

The couple joined the ranks of major Republican donors in 2012, when they spent \$90 million, largely on the presidential race. Their spending on congressional races soon grew to match their spending on races for the White House, and their influence can now be felt in elections across the country.<sup>51</sup>

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.<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup> He was the largest individual donor on Wall Street in the 2020 elections.<sup>54</sup>

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.<sup>55</sup> The Washington Post has called him an "unofficial ambassador" to China, and credited him with softening President Trump's stance on Chinese trade.<sup>56</sup> Schwarzman's influence goes beyond economic policy; he also reportedly counseled the former president towards the decision to eliminate DACA.<sup>57</sup> 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

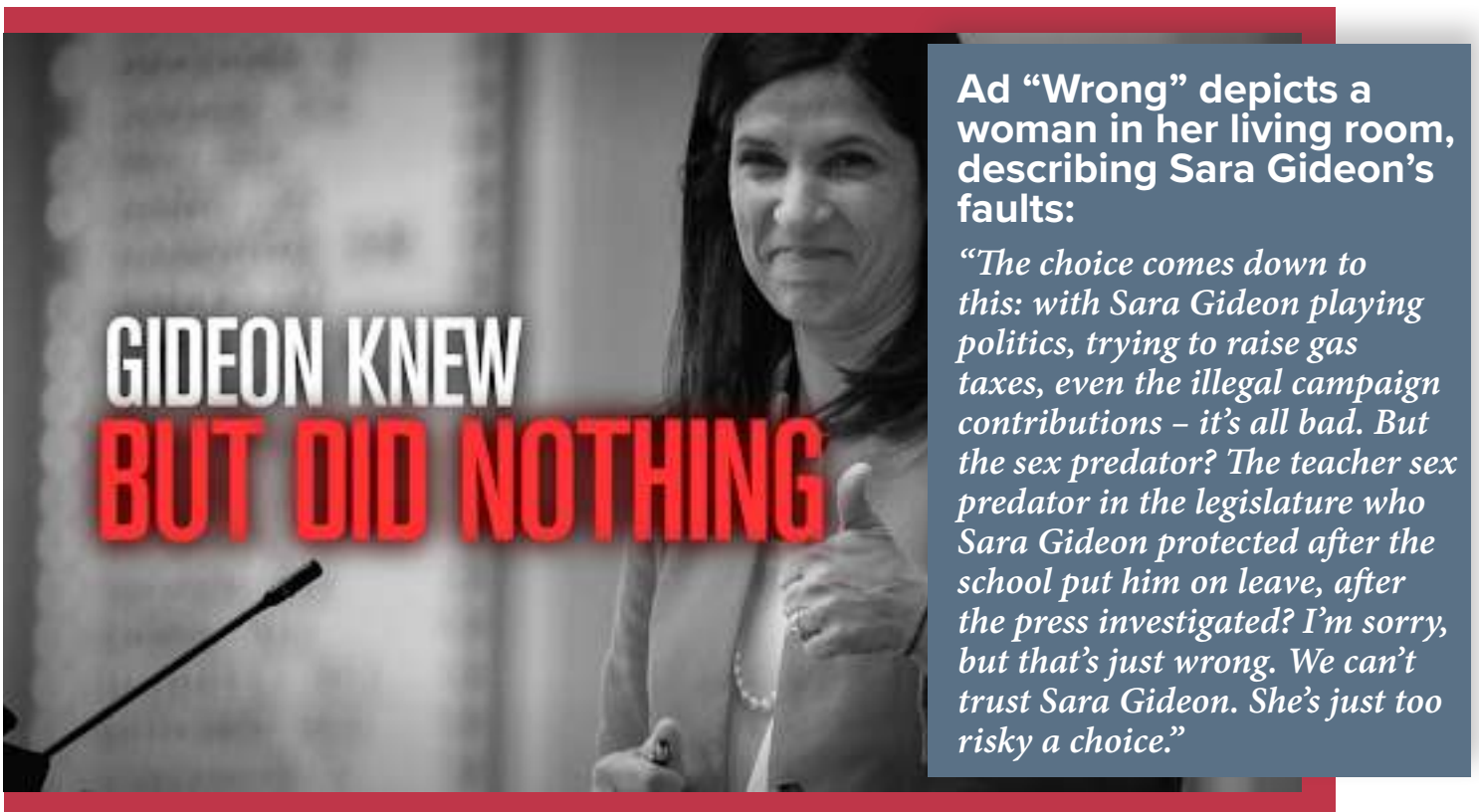
invasion of Poland),<sup>58</sup> and he called the 2017 Republican tax cuts “a game changer.”<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, he maintains that he is working in the interests of the American people: “I have objectives I think are worthy for all people, and everybody should benefit in that.”<sup>60</sup>

Together, the Adelsons, Stephen Schwarzman, and One Nation provided well over one-third of the Senate Leadership Fund’s total receipts.

### **Kentucky Republican Controlled Super PAC Spends Millions in Maine on Attack Ads and Disinformation.**

Overall, the Senate Leadership Fund

spent ten times as much on attack ads against Democrats as it did on pro-Republican ads.<sup>61</sup> In Maine, the ratio was even more extreme: the group spent \$12.5 million attacking Sara Gideon, but just under \$100,000 supporting Susan Collins.<sup>62</sup> The result was over 40 different television and radio ads, nearly all of them attack ads. Together, the ads made just seven distinct assertions, incessantly repeating the same talking points. And while few of the claims were entirely false, many were dramatically blown out of proportion. The negativity, repetition, and distortion of truth were hallmarks of the most recent election season in Maine, and they came as a direct result of Super PAC spending.



**Ad “Wrong” depicts a woman in her living room, describing Sara Gideon’s faults:**

*“The choice comes down to this: with Sara Gideon playing politics, trying to raise gas taxes, even the illegal campaign contributions – it’s all bad. But the sex predator? The teacher sex predator in the legislature who Sara Gideon protected after the school put him on leave, after the press investigated? I’m sorry, but that’s just wrong. We can’t trust Sara Gideon. She’s just too risky a choice.”*

## One of the most reviled ads distributed by the Senate Leadership Fund was entitled “[Wrong](#).”

The “Wrong” ad makes three distinct claims: that Gideon is (or was) trying to raise gas taxes, that she received illegal campaign contributions, and that she protected a sexual predator in her legislature. The first two claims are mostly true, though blown slightly out of proportion: the revenue from the gas tax would have been refunded to consumers,<sup>63</sup> and the campaign finance violation was minor.<sup>64</sup> As for the third claim, Gideon likely had no knowledge of her colleague’s misconduct until the press broke the story, after which she immediately called for his resignation. PolitiFact reported that “there [was] no evidence she took any action to cover up the matter” and rated an ad making a similar claim “mostly false.”<sup>65</sup>

### Who is this?

In addition to making factually questionable claims, this advertisement used the same actress to portray a concerned voter as ads in Maine, [Kansas](#) and [Iowa](#).<sup>66</sup> While

the ads try to avoid specific claims that the woman really is a voter in Maine (or Kansas or Iowa) the actress’s use of “we” certainly implies that she is an everyday citizen of the state who is honestly considering her voting options.



# THE BIG MONEY IN POLITICS

## IMPACT ON MAINE

The \$200 million spent in the Maine Senate race in 2020 mostly came from wealthy interests outside of Maine, and mostly focused on tearing Mainers apart.

The most visible impact of the spending was the negativity of the race. Despite accusations thrown by both candidates, neither Gideon nor Collins was entirely responsible for the race's tone. Their campaigns ran ads which were, respectively, 50% and 36% negative.<sup>67</sup> The parties leave more of the dirty work to the Super PACs, distancing themselves despite the close ties. Spending by the Senate Majority PAC and the Senate Leadership Fund was over 98% negative. Other top-spending outside groups, including the NRSC, the DSCC, the 1820 PAC, and Women Vote! spent similarly large portions of their budgets on negative advertising.<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, this negativity failed to focus on the issues most important to Mainers, who are interested in solutions, not partisan affiliation.<sup>69</sup>

Compare the [back-and-forth](#) between the Gideon and Collins campaigns regarding Bath Iron Works to the [best attempts by the Senate Majority PAC](#) and [the Senate Leadership Fund](#) to connect with Maine voters. Neither Bath Iron Works ad is perfect – the Collins ad especially was criticized as misleading – but they represent appeals by candidates who know the state well, and care about the issues that matter to its voters. On the other hand, with a change to the narrators' accents, the two linked Super PAC ads could have been run in any federal election in any state.

Similarly, advertising by nationwide groups pulled the focus of the race away from Maine and towards national “wedge” issues and attacks. For example, advertising by the Senate Majority PAC in Maine focused heavily on the (largely false) claim that Collins' votes have threatened Mainers' healthcare; here are [ads broadcast in six different states](#) which repeat the phrase “X voted n times to eliminate protections for pre-



**“We don’t want the messaging and the debate controlled by out-of-state money, no matter where it’s coming from.”**

- Roger Katz, former Republican State Senator

existing conditions” in some form or another. Across the aisle, the Senate Leadership Fund focused on personal attacks against Sara Gideon rather than national issues. But in other states, it distributed ads with the same message [again and again and again](#), promising that the target state’s Democratic candidate was backed by radical far-left interests.

It may seem obvious that groups which operate in many states would repeat their messaging across different races. But it is a tremendous loss that every competitive Senate race this cycle was contested on the basis of the same divisive national issues selected by party operatives.

It is a crucial component of our democracy that members of Congress are responsive to issues unique to their home states. Former Republican State Senator Roger Katz puts it more simply: “We don’t want the messaging and the debate controlled by out-of-state

money, no matter where it’s coming from.”<sup>70</sup>

An anecdote from an organizer with the Gideon campaign illustrates a further issue. In the final weeks of the race, he recalls receiving a surprising message from canvassers: despite their frustration with the overwhelming number of ads, voters were confused about what both Gideon and Collins stood for. “They never talk about the issues,” was a voter complaint frequently relayed to him. It may seem absurd that with over \$100 million already spent on messaging, voters could be confused about the candidates’ platforms. Yet such is the effect of campaigns dominated by big-money outside spending groups, rather than messaging from the candidates themselves: discussion of the issues is crowded out by personal attacks.



## How Maine's Millions Stymied True Reform

In 2020, Maine was the only state to use ranked-choice voting (RCV) in a Senate election. The adoption of RCV in Maine required a massive effort, including a widespread signature-collection campaign, years of debate over its correct implementation, and the rare use of the “people’s veto” to rescue the law from legislative gridlock.<sup>71</sup>

It was hailed by its proponents as an effective tool for making elections more democratic, more respectful, more open, and less polarized, and as one of the many ways in which Maine sets itself apart from the ugly politics of many other states.

RCV proponents say it will make elections more accurately reflect the will of the people by ensuring that a candidate can only win with a majority of votes. Further, after adopting RCV, some local campaigns become more positive as candidates tried to attract their opponents’ second-choice votes.<sup>72</sup>

Finally, RCV proponents claim its ability to decrease polarization and increase the openness of elections. These goals are two sides of the same coin: aiming on the one hand to force major candidates to define themselves by their ability to produce solutions

(rather than defining themselves in opposition to a single opponent), while also creating opportunities for third-party candidates to succeed (rather than running “protest campaigns”).

The domination in Maine by millions of dollars in outside spending from wealthy factions fighting for control in Washington D.C. wiped out most or all of the proffered benefit of RCV in Maine. The money of outside Super PACS and the major-party candidates was a daily blow to civility, thoughtful debate, policy or ideas from new voices. Any message or information from the additional candidates that RCV allows, one on the right (Max Linn, a Bar Harbor financial planner and supporter of former President Donald Trump) and one on the left (Lisa Savage, a Maine teacher) was completely smothered by the outside money pouring into what national interests saw as a Democratic-Republican battle for control of the US Senate.

Linn received no Super PAC support, and outside spending on behalf of Savage totaled just \$19,140, less than one-tenth of a percent of the outside spending for either Collins or Gideon.<sup>73</sup> As a result of this extreme lack of competitiveness, Collins and Gideon (and their outside spending supporters)

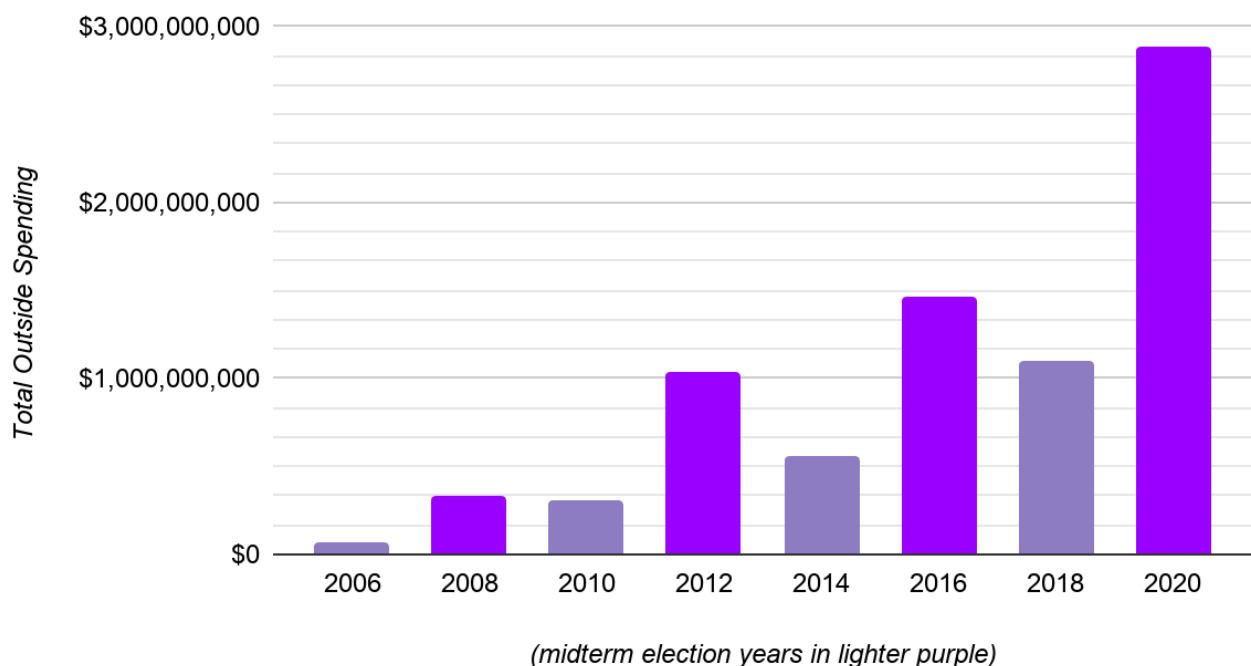
were still able to define their campaigns in opposition to each other, rather than in terms of the constructive solutions Mainers were looking for. And the campaigns of Savage and Linn had no opportunities to make their alternative agendas heard against the din of outside spending. Linn in particular seemed to acknowledge the futility of running against the interests of major donors, running a protest campaign that resorted to [dramatic stunts](#) on the debate stage rather than substantive arguments.

These are the ways in which the big money system has failed Mainers. We see misleading attack ads dominate races, increasing our divisions. We see voters frustrated by overwhelming levels of advertising, yet less informed

about their choices. We see cookie-cutter messaging that focuses on national issues instead of the needs of Mainers. We see the goals of a grassroots, Maine-led effort to implement ranked-choice voting stymied by wealthy out-of-staters. And ultimately, we see that the free exchange of ideas among voters is weakened, not strengthened, when the voices of Mainers are shut out by the moneyed interests crowding our airwaves.

Without significant and fundamental change, these problems will get much, much worse. Outside spending to influence elections doubled from \$1.4 billion in 2016 to nearly \$2.9 billion in 2020,<sup>74</sup> and there is no reason to believe that spending levels will not continue to grow in future elections.

Total Outside Spending in Elections Since 2006 <sup>79</sup>



# MAINERS ARE UNITED TO FIX OUR BROKEN SYSTEM

We are currently on track for ever-increasing levels of election spending. 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 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 and Mainers are few.

This vision is within reach, but the Supreme Court has blocked every effort to move towards it with the controversial legal theory that unlimited money is "free speech." That's why Americans are turning toward a [constitutional amendment](#) to limit the influence of money in politics (read the proposed text [here](#)). Only an amendment can override misguided Supreme Court decisions and provide the foundational reform that the problem of political spending urgently requires. And this reform is not only necessary – it's popular.

**"We agree that policy should not be influenced by the biggest donors but should represent the voices and wisdom of the people and places involved."**

[Portland Press Herald, 9/27/20]

- Amy Cartmell, American Promise Maine Chapter Leader

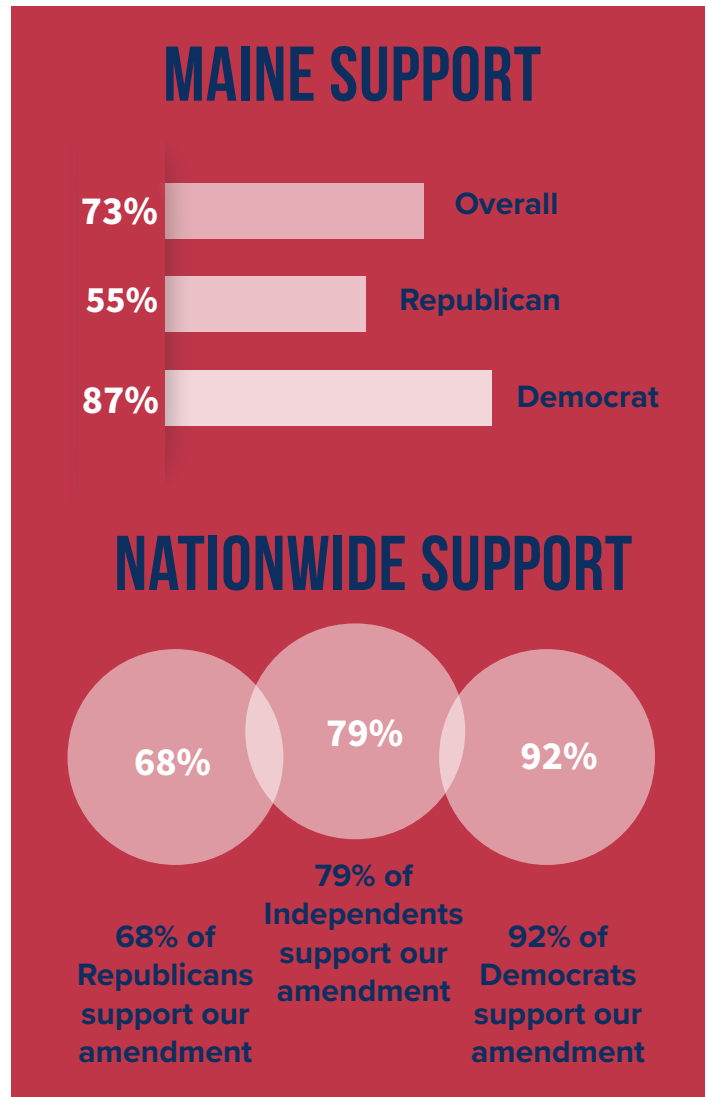


A [poll](#) in August of 2020 showed that 73% of Mainers support a constitutional amendment to limit political spending, including 55% of Republicans and 87% of Democrats;<sup>80</sup> a [national poll](#) found even higher levels of support with 75% in favor, including 66% of Republicans and 85% of Democrats.<sup>81</sup>

## STAND WITH MAINE

[Stand With Maine](#) is the volunteer state chapter of American Promise, a national non-partisan organization uniting Americans to ratify a constitutional amendment to enable limits on the power of money in elections, and ensure representation and effective self-government for all Americans.

In 2013, Republicans, Democrats and Independents came together to in the Maine State Legislature to make Maine of the first states calling for an amendment to the US Constitution to enable Americans to enact reasonable limits and rules for contributions and spending in elections. Now, 22 States have done so and momentum for this constitutional amendment to put



voters, not donors, first is growing fast. Stand With Maine has drawn on this bipartisan desire for change to build a network of support ranging from the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine to Maine Citizens for Clean Elections, from businesspeople to farmers to former state and U.S. senators. Every Mainer, regardless of political party - or no party - can join the thousands of Mainers working together across the State to put Maine first, and end the domination of outside money in our elections.

# STAND WITH MAINE



*Elections where Mainers are heard and Maine issues are addressed. Respectful debate with a wide range of views. Candidates and elected officials focused on constituents and the interests of Maine and the country, rather than big donors and fundraising. A united America and problem-solving government.*

**With the support of Mainers from every corner of the state, we can make this vision a reality.**

**Sign up at [standwithmaine.org](https://standwithmaine.org).**

*This report was made possible by American Promise, a national non-partisan organization uniting Americans to pass and ratify a constitutional amendment to enable even-handed and reasonable limits on the role of money in our political system. Volunteers in American Promise's Maine Chapter, Stand With Maine, contributed to the report, which obtained data and analysis from the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics/Open Secrets. American Promise and Stand With Maine thanks Ayden Nichol, a Bowdoin College student and American Promise research fellow, who was the primary researcher and author.*

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