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[Big money in elections now speaks louder than ever](#)

By Editorial Board

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In the midst of January's State of the Union speech, a young president departed from tradition by publicly scolding the members of the U.S. Supreme Court.

"With all due deference to separation of powers, last week the Supreme Court reversed a century of law that, I believe, will open the floodgates for special interests, including foreign corporations, to spend without limit in our elections.

"I don't think American elections should be bankrolled by America's most powerful interests ..." the president declared.

Obama showed neither deference to the Court nor to the longstanding tradition calling for the justices to remain silent, show no emotion nor respond.

Meanwhile, Democratic lawmakers and Obama Cabinet members arose to loudly applaud the president's comments, virtually surrounding the justices who sat passively.

Except one.

Justice Samuel Alito Jr. winced visibly and seemed to mouth the words, "Not true."

While the president was very rude, time has shown he was also very right.

In October and November, the floodgates were wide open. Hundreds of millions of dollars in new campaign money flooded the election process to buy negative ads.

And much of the money is now completely untraceable.

Entirely new groups sprung up outside the national party system to collect and spend the millions.

Karl Rove's new group, American Crossroads, is thought to have spent \$50 to \$80 million in this cycle.

NBC News reported that the bulk of this funding "came from a small circle of extremely wealthy Wall Street hedge fund and private equity moguls," no doubt many of the same Wall Streeters who nearly sunk the U.S. economy in 2008.

Democrats have had their own deep-pocketed benefactors, like billionaire financier George Soros. In Maine, Wall Street mogul Donald Sussman has funded a variety of liberal causes, including Congresswoman Chellie Pingree's re-election bid.

But the Supreme Court decision has had an even more far-reaching impact.

Campaign spending reports will eventually show that far more was spent on legislative races than ever before.

Karl Rove's group bought attack ads against Democrats in five Maine Senate races this year, including the one between incumbent Deb Simpson of Auburn and former Sen. Lois Snowe-Mello of Poland.

In one day just before the election, outside groups bought \$87,000 worth of attack ads against Simpson. She then qualified for \$38,000 in Clean Election funding, which she said came too late to be used effectively.

Clean Election matches are limited to twice the original amount given to candidates.

So, in a Senate race like Simpson's, candidates can receive a maximum of \$38,000. It is likely that Snowe-Mello, who won the race, would have spent well over \$100,000.

And this is happening in races across the country, in far larger amounts.

Big bucks don't always win races, however. The three millionaires who spent collectively more than \$250 million of their own money on U.S. Senate races this year all lost.

Still, money does open doors, buys influence and affects the outcome of legislation. In fact, during the last presidential administration, lobbyists for coal, oil and power companies were appointed to agencies that actually wrote coal, oil and energy legislation.

We can debate forever the legal merits of the Supreme Court decision that opened the floodgates.

The undeniable effect, however, is that very wealthy individuals, unions and corporations now have more influence than ever before.