



[MAINE COMPASS: Big money wields too much power over our election system](#)

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President Abraham Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address 148 years ago, on Nov. 19, 1863.

I've been thinking about those powerful words and the soldiers who died fighting to keep our country together. I've been thinking about my own service and what we are fighting for today

I went into the service wanting to fight for the things I believe in. Things like freedom and equality under the law. Democratic principles like checks and balances and the idea that the power resides in the people.

Lincoln's short but memorable speech reminds us that it is up to each of us to sustain these values so that we can have that "government of the people, by the people, for the people" that he spoke of.

My time in the National Guard afforded many opportunities to reflect on America's place in the world. We are known as a great bastion of freedom and democracy, but we don't always live up to these ideals.

What has become clear to me since I returned from Iraq and re-entered civilian life is that even though people continue to make this democracy work, by voting, by running for office, and by representing fellow citizens on everything from local school boards to the U.S. Congress, all is not well in our political system.

Today, too much cash, courtesy of the corporate sector, intrudes on our government of, by and for the people. Congress has tried for more than 100 years to limit corporate activity in elections in order to reduce the influence in government, but, aided by a series of U.S. Supreme Court decisions that twist the First Amendment beyond recognition, corporations today enjoy the same right to free speech in elections as you and I do.

The result is that big money wields greater influence than ever. It is evident in who wins elections, and in our national debate about everything from tax policy to health care to the government's regulatory oversight. And increasingly, in the outcome of those debates.

Americans are right to think the deck is stacked.

I am not an expert on campaign finance law, but I know that allowing corporations to buy elections does not further First Amendment goals and does not foster a healthy democracy. The court has not yet ruled that corporations can vote, but its recent decisions mean that those of us who do vote will be subject to an onslaught of deceptive advertising before every election.

Delivered by a largely corporate-owned media, voters will have to work harder and harder to sort fact from fiction, and to determine what candidates stand for and what ballot questions are all about.

We need to get big money out of our politics if democracy is to work. This is a fundamental issue that must be addressed if we are to fulfill the promise of a government of, by, and for the people.

We can start here in Maine by building on the successful first decade of Clean Elections.

Citizens initiated this breakthrough reform, and for 10 years most Maine legislators have run for their seats using Clean Elections funds rather than seeking private donations from special interests.

Last spring, the U.S. Supreme Court eliminated one element of Clean Elections laws -- the matching funds system that was designed to keep the playing field level.

The first order of business for the 125th Maine Legislature when it convenes in January should be to amend the law with an alternative policy that will keep Clean Elections working for the next generation of candidates and voters.

In Washington, Congress would do well to pass the Fair Elections Now Act, which like Maine's Clean Election system, creates an alternative funding system that runs on small donations from in-district voters combined with limited public funds.

These systems put a premium on citizen participation, and citizen participation is exactly what we need to pass the laws in the first place and maintain them.

I'm proud of my military service, but I am also proud of my ability to make a difference as a regular citizen. I didn't fight for corporate interests in Iraq, and I will not fight for them here. I will fight for a political system that values the voter over big moneyed special interests; one that allows our American democracy to live up to its highest ideals.

I can think of no better way to honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our country.

Andrew Campbell, a former Army guardsman, toured in Iraq 2004-05 with the 133rd Engineer Battalion. He was discharged from the military in 2008, and is a senior at the University of Southern Maine majoring in psychology. A Brunswick native, the 28-year-old lives in Portland.