

July 25, 2012

## [Maine Voices: Maine senators' rejection of Disclose Act helps keep voters in the dark](#)

**Their rationale for their votes doesn't take into account the need to know who's influencing elections.**

By Jill Ward, who is affiliated with the League of Women Voters of Maine

**AUGUSTA** — The Supreme Court's wrong-headed decision in *Citizens United v. FEC* has opened the floodgates to secret money in our elections.

In 2010, we saw a huge increase in election-related advertising through supposedly "independent" expenditures, and most of the money came from unidentified sources.

This year promises more of the same – much more. Corporations, unions and wealthy individuals can hide the fact that they are funneling tens of millions of dollars into ad campaigns designed to elect or defeat candidates. And, in truth, it's the voter who is left in the dark.

Last week, the Senate had the opportunity to do something about it. Twice, the Senate had the opportunity to put the voter first, to shine some badly needed light on the sources of all that secret money flowing through our political system, and twice, it failed.

The Disclose Act of 2012 came up for not one, but two votes in the Senate last week and was defeated both times. The bill would require that corporations, labor unions, trade associations, nonprofit advocacy groups and super PACs disclose campaign contributions and expenditures of more than \$10,000 or more within 24 hours of spending the money.

It is a common-sense measure that would put more information in the hands of voters who are increasingly cynical about having their voices heard in a system that caters more to the loudest voices with the biggest pocketbooks.

As misguided as the *Citizens United* decision is, even the Supreme Court justices recognized the value of disclosure. By an 8-1 vote, they upheld disclosure requirements, calling them important to "providing the electorate with information."

Maine Sens. [Olympia Snowe](#) and [Susan Collins](#) both joined their fellow Republicans in voting to kill the bill.

In their public statements explaining the rationale for their votes, the senators both expressed a general concern for the fairness of the bill, claiming that the requirements did not apply to unions and corporations equally. Never mind that the bill treats corporations and unions exactly the same.

And Sen. Collins' statement about "the longstanding practice of election laws in this country treating corporations and unions alike" dates from a time when unions were actually a powerful counterbalance to corporate power.

That is no longer the case. Unions are weaker than they've been in a generation, while corporate power has only grown. The asymmetry of the situation makes this argument hard to credit.

But most importantly, in all the worrying about how the bill would affect donors, unions and corporations, there was one important constituency missing – the voter. Where do we fit in this equation? Who is looking out for us?

We do have the right to know who is making unlimited campaign expenditures and influencing elections – whether it is a corporation, union, trade association or nonprofit advocacy group. We have the right to know so we can judge for ourselves what to believe about the political advertising we see. We shouldn't be kept in the dark.

This is not a partisan issue. Roll back the clock just a few years and you can find powerful statements from Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, Sen. John McCain and, yes, Sen. Snowe on the importance of disclosure. You can also find evidence of Democrats opposing these same ideas.

As Sen. Snowe continues to remind us, today's political climate has reached toxic levels. It has become nearly impossible for Democrats and Republicans to work together on policies that work for voters.

Supporting greater disclosure in our elections and empowering voters, even in this small way, would have been a step in the right direction.

It was an opportunity missed. Twice.

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*- Special to the Press Herald*