

Sun Journal

[OUR VIEW: Money now flooding state's political process](#)

Editorial Board

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Commentators warned that we would see money pouring into the election process after a 2010 Supreme Court decision opened the door to big, anonymous political contributions.

This year represents the first full-scale election since that decision, and the results are eye-popping.

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections recently put together preliminary numbers for Maine. As of about Oct. 22, indirect election spending in state races has already far exceeded total independent spending in both 2010 and 2008.

As the accompanying graph shows, this type of spending is usually heaviest in the two weeks before Election Day. If that pattern holds, and we have no reason to think it will not, this election in Maine will far and away exceed all others.

You may remember the unfortunate confrontation in 2010 when President Barack Obama rudely chastised the members of the U.S. Supreme Court during his State of the Union speech.

Obama said the court's decision would "open the floodgates for special interests, including foreign corporations, to spend without limit in our elections."

The justices sat stone-faced, except for Associate Justice Samuel Alito, who shook his head and seemed to say, "Not true."

The breach of etiquette aside, it is now clear that Alito underestimated the impact of the decision.

While there has been no evidence that ominous foreign powers are at work, the early statistics from Maine clearly show that corporations, unions and very wealthy individuals are having a far larger impact on this election.

One state Senate race in Bangor, between Republican Nichi Farnham and Democrat Geoffrey Gratwick, will probably become the most expensive legislative race in Maine history.

As of last week, according to the Bangor Daily News, the two parties and political action committees have spent \$414,000, mostly on negative ads, in this race alone.

The evidence so far isn't that millions of individuals have begun donating small amounts to candidates and super PACs. Instead, hundreds of large organizations and very wealthy individuals are spending millions of dollars each, much of it anonymously, to get their point across.

To supporters of the U.S. Supreme Court Citizens United decision, this represents an increase in political free speech, and a good thing.

To opponents, this means large, outside special interests are now able to out-shout ordinary Americans, and without accountability.

The undeniable truth in politics is that election spending results in special-interest influence in state legislatures and Congress.

Citizens United is the law of the land, but it is also a breeder reactor that will inject increasingly large quantities of money into the public decision-making process.

Whether that advances the cause of clean, open elections and good government seems very unlikely.

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The opinions expressed in this column reflect the views of the ownership and the editorial board.