

# OPINION

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## Stop Secret Election Spending

Goal should have support from all sides

BY MICHAEL B. KEEGAN

Whatever you thought of the outcome of November's elections, you were probably, like me, relieved to see the end of an unusually nasty season of political ads. An unprecedented 1.5 million political ads aired in October alone - many of them false or misleading attack ads paid for by anonymous special interest groups.

Congress will have the opportunity, when it gathers again this month, both to put some of the bitterness of the 2010 elections behind it and to eliminate these anonymous campaign ads from our democracy.

By passing the Disclose Act, a bill requiring groups that spend money in elections to disclose the identities of their donors,

members of the new Congress would show that they are willing to work across party lines to do what is right for voters and for democracy.



What the legislation does is simple: it would require organizations that spend money to influence elections to disclose the sources of major campaign contributions. The disclosure rules would apply equally to conservative and progressive groups. Under the proposed law, voters would go to the polls armed with more information, and wealthy individuals and corporations paying for political advertisements would be held accountable for their claims.

The 2010 election cycle made clear the need for greater transparency of campaign spending. When the Supreme Court ruled last year that corporations could spend unlimited amounts of

money on political ads, it opened the door for groups to funnel huge sums from corporations and wealthy individuals to fund campaign ads, without disclosing the identity of the donors.

Because the people and corporations behind these groups remained in the shadows, voters

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had no way of knowing who was trying to sway their vote and to what end. According to the Sunlight Foundation, these secretive groups spent a whopping \$126 million on federal elections this year.

Take, for instance, American

Crossroads, a group founded by Bush political advisor Karl Rove. Its affiliate, Crossroads GPS, spent almost \$17 million on ads attacking Democratic candidates throughout the country. They didn't have to disclose the source of a single penny.

A reporter later found that Crossroads GPS received significant funding from Wall Street bankers -- and then turned around and used its money to buy ads criticizing lawmakers who voted for the extremely unpopular Wall Street bailout.

These ads ultimately served the interest of Wall Street by helping to elect pro-corporate, anti-regulation candidates, and did a disservice to voters, who had no way of tracking the ads' origins or intentions.

Some argue that making groups disclose their donors limits those donors' free expression. But even the Supreme Court justices who ruled to allow corporations to spend unlimited

money on elections recognized that voters have an interest in knowing who is spending that money, and who they're spending it.

Whatever your opinion of campaign spending limits, there's no reasonable explanation for allowing the wealthiest and most powerful in our society to pull strings in our elections in secret, while voters are left in the dark.

Covert spending will only balloon in the 2012 elections if Congress doesn't stop it in its tracks. Republicans in Congress, who benefitted from the vast majority of this shadowy spending in 2010, made sure that the Disclose Act didn't make it into law before the midterm elections.

Now is the time for members of both parties to put the 2010 elections behind them and do what's right for voters and right for democracy.

Michael B. Keegan is the president of People for the American Way.

## Right on Don't Ask, Don't Tell

Saddened by Dream Act obstruction

BY CARLA (KC) HANSON AND SUE HAGMEIER

The Multnomah County Democratic Party applauds the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," and is deeply saddened by the continuing Republican Party obstruction of the Dream Act.

"Don't Ask, Don't Tell was a discriminatory policy that forced gay and lesbian service mem-

bers out of the military services, disrupting their lives and jeopardizing national security.

We commend Oregon Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley for their consistent support of the repeal specifically, and their ongoing support of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community more broadly.

The Dream Act is not only a significant part of comprehensive immigration reform, but also the fair and right thing to do for immigrants who arrived here as children, subject to their parents' decisions.

The Dream Act is not a blanket amnesty, but includes specific requirements for these young men and women to qualify for permanent residency, and then for citizenship. Among other requirements, they must serve their country, America, in the military, or commit to and complete a course of study at an institution of higher learning.

Sen. Jeff Sessions, a Republican from Alabama, has called these children criminals. This is false, inhumane and cruel. We are grateful and

proud that our Senators Wyden and Merkley have supported the Dream Act.

Said Multnomah Democratic Party Chair Carla "KC" Hanson:

"I have a young friend, brought here from Mexico as a four-year-old. 'A' is now an articulate, intelligent and compassionate 22 year old, hardworking and of impeccable character, who excelled in high school. I have no doubt that 'A' would be an exceptional college student, diligent in a profession and an asset to the

community.

"But instead of that chance, he faces the uncertain future of being classified as an 'illegal,' and fears repercussions for choices made for him at an age he can barely remember. Portland, Oregon, USA is his home and he knows no other. 'A' deserves that chance to become an excellent citizen in the only country he knows."

Carla (KC) Hanson is chair and Sue Hagmeier is communications officer for the Multnomah County Democratic Party.

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