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OUR VIEW

Shadow of Citizens United needs lifting

It has been more than five years since a 2010 Supreme Court ruling, now known colloquially as the "Citizens United decision," lifted prohibitions on political spending by corporations and private citizens.

It spawned the era of the super PACs. Those political action committees have been able to spend unlimited amounts of money to campaign for candidates for federal offices, as long as they do not coordinate with a candidate or campaign.

Some consider the ruling an expansion of liberty, an unshackling of regulation that has allowed the free market to operate unfettered. We all have a First Amendment right to free expression, and how we spend our money is as much of an expression as anything else. (Think about a red, convertible Porsche.)

But others worry that unlimited financial donations have increased corruption, given the rich an oversized influence on federal elections, and made politicians less reliant on actually serving voters.

The OSPIRG Foundation, an Oregon-based organization that works to protect consumers and promote good government, recently looked at how donations influenced the 2014 election in the Beaver State.

That year, OSPIRG found that small donors (those who gave less than \$100) donated a total of \$6.5 million. OSPIRG estimated the contributions came from as many as 91,000 people.

At the same time, approximately 1,000 organizations donated \$5,000 or more, and their contributions totaled \$64 million. Out of state donors were responsible for about \$44 million of that.

In essence, big spenders had nearly 10 times the influence than did the measly 99 percenters. If you

don't think that has an effect on politicians and policy, you've clearly not lived long in this world. Money talks and politicians are more apt than most to give it a bullhorn. What to do about it?

The clearest and simplest way, which has not had much traction in the courts, is to limit the size of cash contributions to political campaigns.

While that appears tied up for another presidential term or two, OSPIRG presented some temporary recommendations:

- Match small contributions with public funds, as is done in New York City.
- Institute a voucher program like Seattle, where every voter in the city is given four \$25 vouchers that they can contribute to candidates of their choosing.
- Enhance and streamline Oregon's political tax credit.

But all of those theories just pump more public money into a system that we're trying to get money out of. Maybe it is more fair that way, but it's still just feeding the beast with a more nutritious meal.

Newspapers are big supporters of the First Amendment, and it takes a lot to convince us of the need for restrictions of any kind.

But we accept libel and slander laws, and know you can't get away with yelling "Fire" in a crowded movie theater. We limit things that do overwhelming damage to public safety, to personal property and reputation, and to society.

And runaway political spending is doing overwhelming damage. The benefit is only available to a select few with the means to exploit it.

A million dollar-plus donation to a politician or a political party is not a gift. It is a purchase. If we don't want our politicians to be bought, we must find ways to limit political donations.

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Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

OTHER VIEWS

Who pays for Malheur standoff?

The (Bend) Bulletin

Gov. Kate Brown said Wednesday in a press conference that she will ask the Legislature next month to come up with money to reimburse Harney County for the expense of having militants ensconced on the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. Lawmakers must do just that.

The occupation, which began Jan. 2, has been an expensive proposition. In the early days, the county's chief executive officer, Judge Steve Grasty, put the price tag at about \$70,000 per day. Wednesday, Brown said the county's ongoing expenses were running about \$100,000 per week. Either way, it's money Harney County doesn't have.

The county is the state's largest — more than 10,000 miles square — and its sheriff's department has an annual budget of \$2.289 million. By contrast, Deschutes County is only about 3,000 miles square, and the sheriff's office has a budget of some \$44.6 million. Just about 7,000 people live in Harney County, only slightly more than live in the city of Madras.

The task of providing law enforcement for a gaggle of visitors ranging from Federal Bureau of Investigation personnel to journalists to occupation sympathizers has stretched the small sheriff's department beyond

its limit, so much so that law enforcement officers from around the state have been helping out when they are able.

And, while Grasty has said he will bill the occupiers' leaders for the county's costs, that's a move unlikely to result in a paid bill.

There's some logic to sending that bill to the federal government, to be sure. The

wildlife refuge is owned by the federal government, and federal officers are in charge of how occupiers are being dealt with — or not dealt with. The occupation's cost, in other words, is not something the county can control.

But asking Uncle Sam to pay the bill is not the same as getting a check in the mail, and unless and until there's certainty that the check is on the way, the state must step in. That means lawmakers, who will convene in Salem beginning Feb. 1, must act to take up the slack.

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OTHER VIEWS



Stay sane America, please!

In January of 2017 someone will stand at the U.S. Capitol and deliver an Inaugural Address. This is roughly the place where Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan once stood. I am going to spend every single day between now and then believing that neither Donald Trump nor Ted Cruz nor Bernie Sanders will be standing on that podium. One of them could win the election, take the oath, give the speech and be riding down Pennsylvania Avenue. I will still refuse to believe it.

Yes, I know what the polling evidence is telling us about Trump, Sanders and Cruz, but there are good reasons to cling to my disbelief.

First, these primary campaigns will not be settled in February. They won't be settled in March or April. Sometimes a candidate can sweep Iowa and New Hampshire and cruise to the nomination. But that candidate has to be broadly acceptable to all parts of the party. Trump, Cruz and Sanders are not.

As Jay Cost writes in *The Weekly Standard*, "This could mean a lengthy nomination battle that stretches all the way to the California primary in June."

On the Republican side the early primaries and caucuses allocate delegates proportionally. Only 16.2 percent of the delegates overall come from winner-take-all states. That means the delegate-getting war will be a slog.

The first day when any candidate could rack up a big winner-take-all delegate harvest is March 15, an eternity from now. More than half the delegates will be allocated after that date.

Second, Cruz and Trump will go after each other with increasing ferocity over the next many weeks or months. There is a decent chance, given their personalities, that they will make each other maximally unattractive and go down in each other's death embrace.

Third, the Trump and Sanders turnout problems are real. Trump is doing very well among people who haven't voted in the past four elections. It's possible he has energized them so much they will actually caucus and vote, but you wouldn't want to bet your gold-plated faucets on it. People who don't vote generally don't vote.

Sanders is drawing support from nonvoters, too. Sanders is up in some polls overall, but he trails big time among people in Iowa who caucused in 2008 and among those who are definitely registered to vote.

It's quite possible that the big story post-Iowa will be how badly these two underperformed.

Fourth, establishment Republicans who



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

are softening on Trump because they think he is more electable than Cruz are smoking something. According to a Pew Research survey, a majority of Americans think Trump would make a poor or terrible president.

Chuck Todd ran through Trump's favorable-unfavorable ratings on "Meet the Press" on Sunday: Among independents, Trump is negative 26 points; among women, negative 36; among suburban voters, negative 24. Is the Republican Party really going to nominate one of the most loathed men in American public life?

Fifth, America has never elected a candidate maximally extreme from the political center, the way Sanders and Cruz are. According to the FiveThirtyEight website, Cruz has the most conservative voting record in the entire Congress. That takes some doing.

Sixth, sooner or later the candidates from the governing wing of their parties will get their acts together. Marco Rubio has had a bad month, darkening his tone and trying to sound like a cut-rate version of Trump and Cruz.

Before too long Rubio will realize his first task is to rally the voters who detest or fear those men. That means running as an optimistic American nationalist with

specific proposals to reform Washington and lift the working class.

If he can rally mainstream Republicans he'll be at least tied with Trump and Cruz in the polls. Then he can counter their American decline narrative, with one of his own: This country is failing because it got too narcissistic, became too much like a reality TV show. Americans lost the ability to work constructively to get things done.

Finally, eventually the electorate is going to realize that in an age of dysfunctional government, effective leadership capacity is the threshold issue. That means being able to listen to others, surround yourself with people smarter than you, gather a governing majority and above all have an actual implementation strategy. Not Trump, Cruz or Sanders has any remote chance of turning his ideas, such as they are, into actual laws.

In every recent presidential election U.S. voters have selected the candidate with the most secure pair of hands. They've elected the person who would be a stable presence and companion for the next four years. I believe they're going to do that again. And if they're not, please allow me a few more months of denial.

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003.

YOUR VIEWS

Water on Mars will provide a boon to Earth

Now that water has been found on Mars, there's no reason to leave it there.

Here come hinged rockets full of water, trunk to tail, in sweet tandem day by day.

Swimming pools, rejoice. Wash your car with elegant Mars2O! Deserts will bloom. Forests with rejoice.

Global warming will succumb to fuller oceans. And fatter clouds.

Water is heavy, so if the payload is in overload we simply dehydrate the water.

D.G. Reese
Echo

Repeal, not reform, is only option for Measure 11

Barb Dickerson has made the people believe that reforming Oregon Measure 11 by handing it to the judge to make decisions in sentencing will reform Measure 11. In fact it does not change Measure 11 guidelines the judge would also have to follow. Look at the Hammonds — they have to finish their sentences, based on mandatory minimum sentences.

Reform will not release anyone who is sentenced under Measure 11. Measure 11 is

meant for first-time offenders. The district attorney charges the defendant with more than one Measure 11 offense, so the bargaining tool is on the table for a sure conviction.

In my opinion the DA extorts human life, telling the defendant, "If you take this plea you get less time," or the state will give the defendant more time if it goes to trial. In fear of the many threats the DA gives the defense, the defendant takes a plea.

The inmates should follow and exhaust appeals. Bring allegations against court ethics violations. This includes defense attorneys, district attorneys, judges and police. Measure 11 looks like a form of human trafficking. Abolishing Oregon Measure 11 is a start to reforming the Oregon justice system and stopping some of the corruption in the justice system.

Measure 11 was a ballot initiative. But lawmakers add laws that affect Measure 11 in a negative manner without the consent of the voters. Measure 11 needs to be put back on the ballot to be abolished. We need education for the public to understand how Measure 11 can affect the public and their loved ones. Measure 11 has put away innocent people.

We have to stand together and get involved to make a change in the justice system.

Cynthia Lester
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.