The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Money = political speech

If you thought the number of political ads were excessive during the Bonamici/Cornilles campaigns for Congress, you're right. Unfortunately, you ain't seen nuthin' yet!

It's been only two years since five of the nine justices of the U.S. Supreme Court opened the door to a flood of money in elections, but we have already felt the impact of the rollback of campaign finance reform. The 2010 midterm election was the most expensive in history, and corporate special interests spent hundreds of millions of dollars trying to elect people who would further line the pockets of big business.

The case of *Citizens United vs. the Federal Election Commission* didn't even ask the Court to rule on political speech; it was about the FEC regulation of the time period before an election when a corporation's political action committee (PAC) could publish political ads. The justices had to go far afield and overturn decades of established law to turn that limited question into a First Amendment ruling that corporations must be treated the same as people regarding political speech.

A corporation can now make unlimited campaign contributions from their general fund, allowing them to spend their customers' and shareholders' money on campaigns without consent or notice. We've seen out-of-state groups spend millions of dollars to campaign against issues that don't fit their agenda, like the tobacco industry's campaign against an increase in the cigarette tax. Now they can do so with nearly total anonymity and no longer need an in-state organization of any kind.

Corporations serve an important purpose, but telling people how to vote isn't one of them. Before *Citizens United*, they raised funds for their PAC's from people who knowingly donated for that purpose. Now they can totally ignore the views of their workers, their customers, their shareholders, and everyone else whose decisions they affect — for good or bad.

Since *Citizens United*, attacks on state laws banning direct corporate contributions are underway in Iowa, Minnesota, Montana and Texas, and there are dozens of challenges to state disclosure laws, many led by James Bopp Jr., the lawyer who brought *Citizens United* to the Supreme Court. Speaking of money in politics, yesterday Mr. Bopp endorsed Mitt Romney.

Out of My Mind...

by Noni Andersen

You've undoubtedly heard the Republican presidential candidates claim that by vetoing the Keystone XL pipeline, President Obama also blocked lower gasoline prices. Then they double down by claiming that his administration has made it impossible for oil companies to expand drilling and production.

They're wrong.

According to *Bloomberg*, the U.S. has reversed a two-decade-long decline in energy independence, increasing the proportion of demand met from domestic sources over the last six years to an estimated 81 percent through the first 10 months of 2011. That would be the highest level since 1992.

The business statistics-laden *Bloomberg* is definitely not a left-leaning organization, so why would they publish such information?

It's quite simple: One reason Americans spent a record amount on gasoline this year is that supplies that might have helped lower prices here were shipped abroad. Mythical lower prices don't exist because U.S. refineries exported a record amount of refined fuels in 2011 to markets in South America, Central America and Europe.

In 2007, U.S. fuel exports held steady at 1.24 million to 1.25 million barrels a day, according to Energy Department statistics. But by November and December, 2011,U.S. fuel exports averaged between 2.77 million barrels a day and 2.89 million barrels a day, the highest ever.

Meanwhile, U.S. drivers paid an average of about $3.50 a gallon for gasoline during the year, also the highest ever.

The increase in fuel exports isn't even a surprise, it was predicted in January, 2011, by analysts with the Energy Information Administration (EIA) of the U.S. Department of Energy, in a presentation to the 2011 Argus Americas Crude Summit in Houston. Joanne Shore, a research analyst at the EIA, and colleague John Hackworth said that U.S. refineries had found lucrative overseas markets, even as they were shutting down domestic facilities due to decreased demand.

Additionally, for the first time since 1997, the United States in 2010 imported less than 50 percent of the liquid fuel it consumed.

Three primary elements led to this reversal: the mandate to use an increasing percentage of biofuels, a drop in demand beginning in 2008 that was caused by the economic downturn and higher mileage standards, and an increase in U.S. crude oil production, reversing a decline that began in 1986.

The EIA also projects a decline in total imports of liquid fuels from about 49 percent of total consumption today, to only 36 percent by 2035. That's a rosy picture, if you're concerned about oil imports. (Not so much if you're concerned about the environment – but that's a top-

Please see page 13