



END CITIZENS UNITED

2020 Resources:

Fighting Corruption, Working for the People

OVERVIEW

ECU'S MISSION:

To fix our democracy by getting big money out of politics and protecting the right to vote. We will work to end our rigged political system by electing reform champions, passing meaningful legislative reforms, and elevating these issues in the national conversation. We will work in partnership with these champions to overturn *Citizens United*, end the unlimited and undisclosed money in politics, and protect and expand the right to vote.

RESEARCH:

ECU has conducted extensive polling and focus groups over the past three years to better understand how Democratic reformers can earn the trust of the American people to change the rigged system and win.

KEY POINTS:

- Americans' top priority is cracking down on Washington corruption. They know Washington works for corporate special interests and big donors, while everyone else pays the price.
- Passing an anti-corruption and reform bill is the key to unlocking every other major issue and moving a progressive agenda forward. It also builds trust with voters.
- Democrats are fighting to unrig the system and have passed the biggest anti-corruption bill in generations, the For the People Act (H.R. 1), while Mitch McConnell and Republicans are blocking the bill to protect the status quo - which benefits them and their corporate special interest donors.
- The only way to make Washington work is to kick out the politicians who have rigged the system and elect candidates who will pass anti-corruption reforms to get big money out of politics and protect the right to vote.

PASSING ANTI-CORRUPTION REFORMS IS THE KEY TO PASSING A PROGRESSIVE AGENDA

Americans know the system in Washington is rigged to benefit corporate special interests and the biggest political donors, while everyone else pays the price.

Big Money in politics has corrupted the system, so it blocks progress on every major issue, from climate, to guns, to health care, to the economy. Passing anti-corruption reforms like the For the People Act is the key to moving a progressive agenda forward.

MCCONNELL AND REPUBLICANS DEFEND THE RIGGED SYSTEM

Mitch McConnell is standing with big donors and refusing to bring the For the People Act to a vote, which is allowing the same special interests to hold up action on all the priority issues that the American people care about.

- Senator McConnell and the Republican-controlled Senate are giving wealthy special interests and their lobbyists what they paid for. They're defending the status quo to protect their bottom line while leaving everyone else behind.
- The Senate's inability to pass legislation to address kitchen table issues to reduce the cost of healthcare and protect our air and water is directly tied to McConnell's refusal to allow a vote on the For the People Act.
- Instead of siding with the American people, he's siding with the lobbyists and wealthy special interests funding Republican campaigns.
- But while McConnell refuses to bring these vitally important bills to a vote, Democrats will keep fighting every day to put the pressure on him and Senate Republicans to do what's right for the American people, not just the wealthy special interests.

CASE STUDY: CLIMATE CHANGE

- **Americans overwhelmingly understand climate change is real and want their leaders to address it.** [70% of Americans](#) understand climate change is happening and believe it is “important,” while [69%--including a majority of Republicans--](#) believe the U.S. needs to take “aggressive” action to fight it.
- **But millions in campaign contributions from energy industry interests and billionaire donors are helping to block action to protect our environment.** The energy sector has made [\\$685 million in contributions](#) since *Citizens United*. [10 of the 17](#) biggest corporate donations to outside groups in the 2018 cycle were from oil and gas companies.
- **Energy companies hire an army of lobbyists to re-enforce their donations.** The energy sector spent [\\$325 million](#) on lobbying in 2018. Over 60% of the industry's [1,845 lobbyists](#) had previously worked in Congress or the executive branch.
- **Our big money system blocks climate action.** Since *Citizens United*, [zero](#) Senate Republicans have supported major climate change legislation, compared to 14 such instances occurring in the seven years prior to the Supreme Court decision. Meanwhile, the 2017 tax bill handed [\\$25 billion in benefits](#) to just 17 oil and gas companies.
- **To address our climate crisis, we must address our democracy crisis.** One reason we've been unable to take meaningful action to address our climate crisis is because of the power corporate polluters wield in Congress. We need to pass H.R. 1 to end the dominance that Big Oil and their lobbyists have had over our political system for far too long.
- **The For the People Act (H.R. 1)**, which passed the House this spring, would combat the dominance of big oil and energy interest money in politics, protect and expand the right to vote, and ensure public officials are working in the public interest.

CASE STUDY: GUN VIOLENCE

- **Broad majorities of Americans are concerned about gun violence in the U.S. and support efforts to reduce it.** [85% of Americans](#)--including 80% of Republicans--are concerned about gun violence, and over [90% of Americans](#) support proposals to expand background checks for gun buyers.
- **The NRA has spent millions on lobbying and campaign contributions to help block actions overwhelmingly supported by Americans.** The NRA contributed [\\$144.3 million](#) in outside spending from 1998-2017, and [88%](#) of campaign contributions from gun rights groups since 1990 have gone to Republicans. In the 2016 cycle alone, the NRA spent at least \$54 million in outside spending, including [\\$34 million through its dark money arm](#)--making it the top dark money group that cycle. Gun groups have spent an additional [\\$76 million on lobbying](#) since 2013, which has included opposition to campaign finance transparency legislation.
- **Gun groups and our big money system block action to reduce gun deaths in this country.** [39,773 people died](#) from gun deaths in 2018--the highest number in 50 years--but Sen. McConnell is blocking bipartisan action to expand background checks, even though that idea is supported by over [90% of Americans](#).
- **To address the epidemic of gun violence in this country, we have to address our democracy crisis.** The House passed meaningful legislation to expand background checks, but the gun groups' influence over the Senate and other Washington politicians has helped block its passage. We need to pass H.R. 1, the For the People Act, to end the dominance gun groups have over politicians and create a democracy that's responsive to the needs of all Americans.
- **The For the People Act (H.R. 1)**, which passed the House with unanimous support this spring, would combat the dominance of big money in politics, protect and expand the right to vote, and ensure public officials are working in the public interest.

CASE STUDY: HEALTH CARE COSTS

- **Many Americans can't afford their prescription drugs and they blame corporate greed for their high cost.** [80% of Americans](#) say the cost of prescription drugs are "unreasonable" and that pharmaceutical company profits are a "major factor". [A quarter of Americans](#) who take prescription drugs say it's difficult to afford their medicines.
- **Pharmaceutical companies give millions in campaign contributions to try to buy access and influence over Congress.** The industry has spent nearly [\\$204 million on campaign contributions](#) since 1990. The industry's trade association gave at least [\\$13 million to dark money groups](#), including to ones opposing the Affordable Care Act.
- **Those campaign contributions are backed up by billions--yes, billions--in money spent on lobbyists.** The industry spent [\\$3.7 billion lobbying](#) Congress and the executive branch from 1998-2018. In 2018 alone, the pharmaceutical and health products industries paid for [three lobbyists for every member of the House](#).
- **The pharmaceutical industry uses its campaign cash and an army of lobbyists to push for cuts in their taxes and to help block action on drug prices.** The 2017 tax bill gave the 10 biggest pharmaceutical companies a [\\$76 billion tax cut](#) on offshore profits, but Sen. McConnell and his colleagues refuse to bring up a vote on 2019 legislation passed by the House that would bring generic drugs more quickly to market--despite 88% of Americans supporting the idea.
- **If we're going to address rising drug costs, we need to reform our democracy to make it accountable to all Americans--not just special interests.** We need to pass legislation like the For the People Act that'll reduce the dominance that pharmaceutical companies and their lobbyists have had over our political system for far too long.
- **The For the People Act (H.R. 1)**, which passed the House this spring, would combat the dominance of pharmaceutical interest money in politics, protect and expand the right to vote, and ensure public officials are working in the public interest.

FIGHTING CORRUPTION, WORKING FOR THE PEOPLE

The corrupting influence of money in politics is the top issue for voters, especially swing and Independent voters. Americans understand how money in politics impacts their lives everyday - from drug prices to climate change to gun safety. One of the most stark examples came in 2017, when Republicans passed the tax bill, which cut taxes for big corporate donors and raised taxes for the middle class, while putting Social Security and Medicare at risk. ECU has conducted research to help bring forward a simple, powerful narrative that shows Democrats are on the side of the people.

FIGHT CORRUPTION: H.R. 1 - THE FOR THE PEOPLE ACT

Passing H.R. 1, the For the People Act, is one of the most popular Democratic achievements of 2019. The bill draws a clear contrast between Democrats, who are fighting for everyday Americans, and Republicans who want to hang on to the corrupt system they designed where corporate special interests can set the agenda and buy-off politicians.

KEY POINTS

1. Talk about fighting corruption rather than passing “reforms.”
2. Politicians are your best foil, and Mitch McConnell is the archetype.
3. Provide hope to fight cynicism, let people know For the People has actually passed the House.

Talking Points

I voted for the biggest anti-corruption bill in generations, which would make politicians disclose where their secret dark-money campaign funds come from and limits the power of special interest lobbyists, so we can change Washington.

Important Takeaway

Highlight the corrupting influence of money in politics rather than “reforming our broken campaign finance system” or focusing on transparency or ethics.

THE FIGHT OVER MONEY IN POLITICS: RESPONDING TO ATTACKS

Republicans will contest your record fighting corruption and your independence from special interests; the issue is simply too important to voters for them to cede it. Despite this, a back-and-forth over money in politics will usually hurt them. It's critical that you engage them. Democrats will benefit from a debate on the issue because Democrats want to change the rigged system and Republicans support the corrupt status quo.

KEY POINTS

1. Highlight the distinction between you, someone fighting to change the system, with your Republican opponent, someone who has rigged the system and will defend it
2. Point to your vote for the For the People Act as a contrast with Republicans who are protecting the corrupt system because they benefit from it
3. Attack the Republican for being beholden to corporate special interests at the expense of everyone else

Talking Points

I'm working for the people of my state/district to change a political system that my opponent has rigged in favor of the special interests. My opponent has taken \$XX from special interests (eg. Pharma, Big Oil, Corporate PACs) and voted to do X (eg. keep drug prices high, block climate change fixes, give a corporate tax cut).

Drug prices are too high because corrupt politicians are in the pocket of the pharmaceutical industry. They take pharma's money and then won't pass my bill, H.R. 3, which would let seniors negotiate with the drug companies through Medicare. And my opponent is blocking the biggest anti-corruption bill in a generation that would unrig the system, so it works for people, not big donors and corporate special interests.

Important Takeaway

Republicans want to undermine your strength. Your goals should be to demonstrate that you are fighting for people and not corporate special interests, working to change the rigged system, and are a trusted leader fighting to change the system that your opponent has corrupted.

THE FOR THE PEOPLE ACT (H.R. 1)

The 2018 election ushered dozens of new grassroots Democrats into Congress who led a movement to stop big money from controlling Washington, and the first bill passed by a new Democratic House was the most comprehensive anti-corruption and democracy reform package in generations.

Republicans are defending the rigged system they created because they are in the pockets of the corporate special interests who fund their campaigns. The proof is that they voted against, do not support, or have joined Mitch McConnell in blocking a fair vote on H.R. 1 for more than a year so far.

- The For the People Act (H.R. 1) is the most comprehensive package of anti-corruption reforms since Watergate. It will end the dominance of big money in politics, protect the right to vote, and restore ethics and accountability in Washington.
- House Democrats have also passed bills to lower the cost of prescription drugs, protect our air and water, reduce gun violence, create a fair economy, increase paychecks, and so much more.
- Unfortunately, Mitch McConnell has blocked action on almost everything we've passed, including nearly 300 bipartisan bills. His refusal to allow a vote on the For the People Act--which would cut the connection between special interests and Washington--is directly related to his refusal to bring up all of these other bills. The same wealthy special interests opposed to ending corruption in Washington are the same ones trying to block progress on the change Americans want to see.
- It's time for Mitch McConnell to stop doing the bidding of wealthy special interests and stand up for Americans tired of the status quo in Washington. He should bring up H.R. 1 for a vote immediately.

H.R. 1 POLICY OUTLINE

Making it Easier, Not Harder to Vote

- **Improve access.** H.R. 1 expands access to the ballot box by taking aim at institutional barriers to voting. It will create automatic voter registration across the country; ensure that individuals who have completed felony sentences have their expand early voting and simplify absentee voting; and modernize the U.S. voting system.
- **Promote integrity.** H.R. 1 commits Congress to build the record necessary to restore the Voting Rights Act; prohibits voter roll purges; and ends partisan gerrymandering to prevent politicians from picking their voters.
- **Ensure security.** H.R. 1 ensures that American elections are decided by American voters without interference by enhancing federal support for voting system security; increasing oversight over election vendors; and requiring the development of a national strategy to protect U.S. democratic institutions.

End the Dominance of Big Money in Politics

- **Guarantee disclosure.** H.R. 1 shines a light on dark money in politics by upgrading online political ad disclosure and requiring all organizations involved in political activities to disclose their large donors.
- **Empower citizens.** H.R. 1 gives political power to everyday Americans, creating a multiple-matching system for small donations, thereby allowing the American people to exercise their due influence in our politics. Modeled on successful systems around the country, this will break special interests' stranglehold on Congress and lay the groundwork for an agenda that serves the American people. It reaffirms that Congress should have the authority to regulate money in politics, pushing back on the wrongheaded *Citizens United* decision. It will be paid for by wealthy tax dodgers and corporate lawbreakers.
- **Strengthen oversight.** H.R. 1 ensures that there are cops on the beat who will enforce the laws. It tightens rules on super PAC, restructures the Federal Election Commission to break the agency's gridlock, and repeals budget riders that prevent government agencies from requiring common sense disclosure of political spending.

Ensure Public Officials Work for the Public Interest

- **Fortify ethics law.** H.R. 1 breaks the influence economy in Washington by expanding conflict of interest law and divestment requirements; slowing the revolving door; and requiring presidents to disclose their tax returns.
- **Impose greater ethics enforcement.** H.R. 1 overhauls the Office of Government Ethics; closes loopholes for lobbyists and foreign agents; and ensures watchdogs have sufficient resources to enforce the law.

DOWNLOADABLE FACT SHEETS

Below you'll find downloadable, issue-specific fact sheets that you can distribute to your constituents. Click the image for downloadable PDF versions.

[Download: Top 10 Ways Citizens United Has Hurt Our Democracy](#)

TOP 10 WAYS *CITIZENS UNITED* HAS HURT OUR DEMOCRACY

"The Supreme Court reversed a century of law that I believe will open the floodgates for special interests - including foreign corporations - to spend without limit in our elections. I don't think American elections should be bankrolled by America's most powerful interests, or worse, by foreign entities."
- President Barack Obama, 2010 State of the Union

- 1) Since the 2010 *Citizens United* decision, there has been **\$4.5 billion** of outside spending in federal elections.
- 2) Before *Citizens United*, over 80% of outside spending was fully disclosed. From 2010-2018, just **54%** was fully disclosed.
- 3) **86%** of all outside spending in federal elections since 1990 has come since the 2010 decision.
- 4) Super PACs have spent almost double what it cost to make all the Star Wars movies combined in our elections.
- 5) **11 megadonors gave \$1 billion** to Super PACs in races from 2010-2018. That's more than 1/5th of the total \$4.5 billion collected by Super PACs.
- 6) Wall St. is the **top industry** contributor since *Citizens United*, giving over \$1.6 billion, \$160 million more than any other industry.
- 7) Pharma corporate PACs have spent over **\$147 million** in federal elections, including \$30 million in the 2018 cycle.
- 8) In 2016 the NRA spent \$35 million in dark money. Since the decision, the NRA has spent nearly **14x more** in dark money than before.
- 9) **10 of the 17** biggest corporate contributions to outside groups in the 2018 cycle were by oil and gas companies.
- 10) **76%** of Americans believe that government is "run by a few big interests looking out for themselves".

REFORMING OUR DEMOCRACY TO SAVE OUR PLANET



Americans
want action on
climate change

BUT

Energy special
interests spend
big on politicians

SO

Politicians listen
to the money
instead of the
people

70% of Americans understand climate change is happening and believe it is “important.”¹

69% of Americans – including a majority of Republicans – believe the U.S. needs to take “aggressive” action to fight climate change.²

78% of Americans believe the government should invest more to develop clean energy sources.³

\$738M in direct campaign contributions from the energy sector since *Citizens United*.⁴

10 of 17 of the biggest corporate contributions to outside groups in the 2018 cycle come from oil & gas companies.⁵

\$326M on lobbying spent by the energy sector in 2018, with nearly 65% of the 1,850 lobbyists hired by the industry coming through the revolving door.⁶

ZERO instances of Senate Republicans voting for or cosponsoring major climate change bills in the 7 years following *Citizens United*; there were previously 14.⁷

\$25B in benefits were reportedly received by just 17 oil and gas companies from the 2017 GOP tax bill.⁸

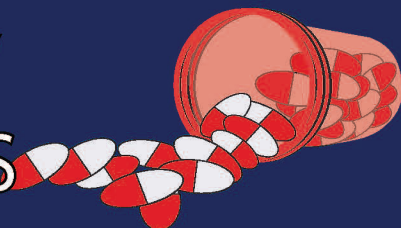
\$649B in subsidies for fossil fuel companies in 2015, a cost of over \$2,000 per American.⁹

The Solution:

COMPREHENSIVE LEGISLATION PASSED BY THE HOUSE BUT BEING HELD UP IN THE SENATE

The **FOR THE PEOPLE ACT (H.R.1, S.949)** would shine a light on dark money in politics; require commonsense political spending disclosure; sever the ties between special interest donors and Congress by creating a small-dollar matching system; and strengthen ethics, conflict-of-interest, and lobbying rules.¹⁰ The **CLIMATE ACTION NOW ACT (H.R.9)** would deny funding to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Agreement global pact, and require the Administration to develop a plan for achieving the pact’s carbon-reduction goals.¹¹

REFORMING OUR DEMOCRACY TO REDUCE RX DRUG COSTS



Americans want action on healthcare and drug prices

BUT

The drug lobby spends big on politicians

SO

Politicians listen to the money instead of the people

80% of Americans say the costs of prescription drugs are “unreasonable,” and believe profits made by pharma companies are a “major factor” for the high costs of prescription drugs.¹

1/4th of Americans taking prescription drugs say it’s difficult to afford their medicines.²

\$333B was spent by the government, consumers, and insurers on prescription drugs in 2017 – a 41% raise from ten years prior.³

\$210M in campaign contributions came from the pharmaceutical industry since 1990.⁴

\$3.7B was spent by the Rx drug industry on lobbying from 1998-2017 – \$1 billion more than any other industry.⁵

1,470 lobbyists hired by the pharmaceutical and health products industries in 2018 – three for every single Member of the U.S. House.⁶

Only 5 House Republicans voted for a 2019 bill to bring generic drugs more quickly to the market – despite 88% of Americans supporting this idea.⁷

\$76B in tax cuts was given to the 10 biggest Rx companies on their offshore profits as a result of the GOP tax bill.⁸

\$28B in projected savings RX companies would have received over a decade if the 2017 GOP bill to repeal ACA had passed.⁹

The Solution:

COMPREHENSIVE LEGISLATION PASSED BY THE HOUSE BUT BEING HELD UP IN THE SENATE

The **FOR THE PEOPLE ACT (H.R.1, S.949)** would shine a light on dark money in politics; require common-sense political spending disclosure; sever the ties between special interest donors and Congress by creating a small-dollar matching system; and strengthen ethics, conflict-of-interest, and lobbying rules.¹⁰

The **ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS LOWER DRUG COSTS NOW ACT OF 2019 (H.R. 3)** would empower the government to negotiate annual prices for the 250 most expensive prescriptions on the market, establish a maximum price on negotiated drugs, and put a \$2,000 cap on out-of-pocket prescription drugs for Medicare recipients.¹¹

REFORMING OUR DEMOCRACY TO REDUCE GUN VIOLENCE



Americans want action to reduce gun violence

BUT

The gun lobby spends big on politicians

SO

Politicians listen to the money instead of the people

85% of Americans, including 80% of Republicans, are concerned about gun violence in the U.S.¹

8% of Americans who want gun safety laws are “very confident” lawmakers will do anything about gun violence, despite nearly 70% wanting strong or moderate restrictions on firearms.²

39,773 people died from guns in the U.S. in 2018, the highest number in 50 years.³

\$144.3M in outside money was spent by the NRA from 1998-2017; \$54 million in the 2016 cycle alone.⁴

91% of the \$45M in campaign contributions from gun rights groups since 1990 went to Republicans.⁵

\$85M was spent by gun groups on lobbying since 2013, including lobbying against commonsense reforms to improve campaign finance disclosure.⁶

Only 8 House Republicans voted for a 2019 bill to expand background checks – despite over 90% of Americans supporting this proposal.⁷

34X more money was given by gun groups to Members who voted for the NRA-backed Concealed Carry Reciprocity Act than given to Members who opposed the bill.⁸

100+ gun safety proposals were introduced but not passed from 2011-2016 while Republicans held the House majority.⁹

**The
Solution:**

**COMPREHENSIVE LEGISLATION
PASSED BY THE HOUSE BUT
BEING HELD UP IN THE SENATE**

The **FORTHEPEOPLEACT (H.R.1, S.949)** would shine a light on dark money in politics; require commonsense political spending disclosure; sever the ties between special interest donors and Congress by creating a small-dollar matching system; and strengthen ethics, conflict-of-interest, and lobbying rules.¹⁰ The **BIPARTISAN BACKGROUND CHECKS ACT (H.R.8)** would expand FBI background checks of prospective gun buyers to include transactions on the internet and between private parties at venues, including gun shows and parking lots.¹¹

REFORMING OUR DEMOCRACY TO PROTECT AMERICANS' PRIVACY



Americans want their online access and privacy protected

BUT

The telecom lobby spends big on politicians

SO

Politicians listen to the money instead of the people

80% of Americans – including 77% of Republicans – say they support net neutrality protections to allow users to access all content without fees or interruption.¹

95% of Americans are concerned about businesses collecting and selling their personal information without permission.²

A majority of Americans are concerned the government will not do enough to regulate U.S. technology companies.³

\$101M in combined career contributions was given from the telecom industry to Members of the 115th Congress.⁴

Over \$1.6B was spent by the telecom industry on lobbying from 1998-2019.⁵

71% increase in lobbying by the main telecom trade group as the government was deciding on net neutrality in late 2017.⁶

Only 1 House Republican voted for a 2019 bill to restore net neutrality rules that require the internet be made equally accessible to everyone.⁷

\$61.2B in 2017 tax cuts were reported by the 5 biggest U.S. telecom companies as a result of the GOP tax bill.⁸

\$9.15M was given by the telecom industry in the 2016 cycle to the 265 lawmakers – all Republicans – who voted to allow internet providers to sell and share user personal information without their consent.⁹

**The
Solution:**

**COMPREHENSIVE LEGISLATION
PASSED BY THE HOUSE BUT
BEING HELD UP IN THE SENATE**

The **FOR THE PEOPLE ACT (H.R.1, S.949)** would shine a light on dark money in politics; require commonsense political spending disclosure; sever the ties between special interest donors and Congress by creating a small-dollar matching system; and strengthen ethics, conflict-of-interest, and lobbying rules.¹⁰ The **SAVE THE INTERNET ACT (H.R.1644)** would reinstate and write into law “net neutrality” rules repealed by the Trump Administration that require the internet to be made equally accessible to all users, and prohibit service providers from offering faster content to customers in return for higher fees.¹¹