

Mo Money, Mo Representation

Written by David Kopp | September 1, 2026

More than 16 years have passed since the Supreme Court decided ***Citizens United v. FEC*** in 2010. The ruling did not allow corporations to donate unlimited money directly to candidates. It allowed corporations and unions to spend unlimited amounts on political messages made independently of a campaign. Together with later court decisions, it helped fuel the rise of super PACs and record outside spending. Since then, American politics has become more expensive, volatile, and exhausting. I believe that public exhaustion benefits the people who already hold the most money and power. After all, you judge a tree by its fruit.

Consider what happened in Emporia, Kansas, in July. Lux Claridge, a 37-year-old physics teacher, was arrested after continuing to clap at a city commission meeting where officials were considering zoning changes for a new data center. The commission had warned the crowd that clapping and other reactions would be treated as disruptions. To the city, it was about keeping order. To many residents, it looked like people were being punished for showing support.

Then there are Flock cameras, automated cameras that scan license plates and store information about where vehicles have been seen. Did your local leaders clearly explain how the cameras would be used before they appeared? Maybe not. The same concern shows up at the national level. In August 2026, the gross national debt passed \$40 trillion. That number reflects decades of tax and spending decisions by Congress and presidents from both parties, not one choice by the Treasury Department. These issues are different, but they raise the same question: how much say do ordinary people feel they have?

To me, these examples show a weakening social contract. Priorities have shifted from serving the people toward serving a plutocracy, a system shaped by the wealthy. Disengagement then becomes a weapon against people who want change. The system bets on people opting out of political debate. Otherwise, there would be more witnesses to the heist. That is why we need to be more engaged than ever before.

Let's try a thought experiment: what would you do to improve society with \$50 billion? No idea is too outlandish! Personally, I would spend \$10 billion filling potholes, \$10 billion picking up litter, \$20 billion building 5,000 addiction treatment centers, and \$2.5 billion giving every American an ice cream cone to celebrate. Do not audit my imaginary budget too closely. That is not the point! Whatever you imagined could still make a real difference for millions of people.

Now let's turn back to campaign money. Across the five federal election cycles from 2016 through 2024, total spending reached roughly \$50 billion. That was not taxpayer money, and it did not all come from corporations. Still, wealthy donors and outside groups now play an enormous role, and their priorities do not always match ours. So how do we stand up to moneyed interests? The same way many civil rights victories have been won: organize, speak up, and vote in every election, including primaries. Whether you are on the right, the left, or somewhere in between, do not surrender one of the strongest checks we have against tyranny: our voices. The project of self-determination ends only if we allow it.

"A nation of well-informed men who have been taught to know and prize the rights which God has given them cannot be enslaved. It is in the regions of ignorance that tyranny reigns."

- Henry Stuber, in a biographical sketch of Benjamin Franklin