

VOTERS INPUT NEEDED, APPLY BY NOVEMBER 2ND by Supervisor Linda Parks, October 2010

More and more, election campaigns are being inundated with big money. The effects of the recent Supreme Court decision that threw out parts of a law limiting spending by corporations and unions have resulted in increased campaign spending.

Highly funded campaigns by high-powered special interests are growing more common, and not just for higher offices. Even our local elections have auto dealers, developers, boxstore chains, contractors, and other corporate players willing to spend 'what it takes' to assure who is elected and what ballot measure prevails.

While big money can influence the outcomes of campaigns, it also influences those who are elected. Some politicians gear their decisions in office specifically to those interests that fund their re-election campaigns, at the cost of the general good. This is tantamount to corruption if it weren't so widespread and accepted (as unacceptable as it is).

One critic suggested that Sacramento politicians should wear uniforms like NASCAR racers with the logos of all their sponsors. MAPLight.org calculated that 60% of the bills that pass the State legislature are sponsored by special interests. Lobbyists are writing legislation that is then introduced by legislators and much of it is passed into law, and it is no wonder. 40% of legislators' campaigns are paid for by business and trade associations, 16 percent by unions. Private citizens make up just 17 percent of the legislators' campaign funds. (Daniel Newman, Mercury News, 7/29/2010.)

If you know who pays to keep our legislators in office then you have a better understanding of why they vote the way they do, like the senators who took money from the plumbing industry and fought laws limiting lead leaching into our drinking water.

How do voters differentiate those politicians willing to engage in pay-to-play politics and those who refuse? While we can't require candidates to put their sponsors' logos on their jumpsuits, we do have laws that require disclosure so voters know where these candidates are when the rubber hits the road. There are

two key indicators of a candidate's position. One is their voting record, and the other is who funds their campaigns.

Fortunately, campaign contributions are required to be disclosed and are readily accessed on the Internet. To see which corporations, unions and individuals are funding the campaigns of state candidates you can go to:

<http://cal-access.sos.ca.gov/campaign/>.

To see the contributors to Ventura County candidates you can go to:

<http://elections.countyofventura.org/CampaignFinance/home.asp>.

Many cities also post the campaign financial records of candidates, including the city of Thousand Oaks that can be accessed at:

http://toaks.org/government/depts/city_clerk/campaign/candidates_committees/default.asp.

Keeping elections balanced and clean falls on the electorate to hold candidates accountable, and that can only happen if people are informed and vote. In this November 2nd election, fill out your absentee ballot or go to your polling place and elect people who put the common good over special interests, and vote for people who represent you!