

How Your Taxes Fund Corporations that Rig the U.S. Political System

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Most politically active Americans are aware of the massive amounts of money spent on political campaigns. And most are also aware that corporate dollars, which fund so-called superPACs (political action committees), give hundreds of millions every election cycle.

In fact, according to a new study by the Sunlight Foundation, a nonpartisan organization that advocates for more transparent, open government, American corporations spent around \$5.8 billion on elections between 2007 and 2012.

If that sounds like a big number – and it is – wait until you see what American corporations got in return.

Corporate investment in political campaigns pays big dividends

According to the foundation, corporations reaped nearly \$4.4 trillion in returns for their investments.

The foundation looked at “influence and its potential results on federal decision makers” for six years – three before the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Citizens United* ruling and three years after the ruling. The study focused on the records of 200 for-profit corporations and companies that had active PACs and lobbyists.

“Their investment was enormous,” the [report, titled, “Fixed Fortunes: Biggest corporate political interests spend billions, get trillions,” said.](#)

No, money doesn’t influence our system – just ask the Supreme Court

“There were 20,500 paying lobbying clients over the six years we examined; the 200 companies we tracked accounted for a whopping 26 percent of the total spent. On average, their PACs, employees and family members made campaign contributions to 144 sitting members of Congress each [election] cycle,” the report noted.

An examination of 14 million records pertaining to campaign contributions, federal budget allocations, lobbying expenditures and other spending found that, on average, “for every dollar spent on influencing politics, the nation’s most politically active [corporations](#) received \$760 [\$4.4 trillion total] from the federal government,” a figure accounting for “two-thirds of the \$6.5 trillion that individual taxpayers paid into the federal treasury.”

What’s more, as the American middle class shrank dramatically during the same six-year

study period, the 200 companies continued getting insane returns on their political investments. They included loans to bail out the automobile industry, the bank bailouts that were “too big to fail,” [federal](#) program expansions that worked to “help prop up prices for agribusinesses and secure trade deals for our biggest manufacturers,” as well as budget measures “that funneled extra dollars to everything from defense contractors to public utility companies to financial industry giants.”

In addition, researchers found that of some \$410 billion in loans issued under the Troubled Asset Relief Program, or TARP, which was created in 2008, nearly 73 percent - or about \$298 - went to 16 of the 200 corporations on the list.

‘Unprecedented amounts of spending’

“Of the 200 corporations we examined, we could sum the financial rewards for 179,” said the foundation’s report. “Of those, 138 received more from the federal [government](#) than they spent on politics, 102 of them received more than 10 times what they spent on politics, and 29 received 1,000 times or more from the federal government than they invested lobbyists or contributed to political committees ...”

The foundation also pointed out that the high court, in its [Citizens United](#) ruling - in which a majority of justices ruled that corporations and unions could essentially donate unlimited amounts of money to super PACs - made this determination: “The appearance of influence or access will not cause the electorate to lose faith in our democracy.” But a quick survey of Americans finds this statement to be absurd on its face; most Americans, the foundation said, were fed up with the way the government currently operates.

And, as the campaign finance-tracking website *Open Secrets* - operated by the Center for Responsive Politics - noted, following the *Citizens United* ruling, “unprecedented amounts of outside spending in the 2010 and 2012 election cycles” occurred.

“Giving corporations unlimited power to influence the government corrupted democracy more than any other single act of legislation, and things won’t get any better until *Citizens United* is reversed,” said an assessment of the study from *Ring of Fire Radio*. “And since corporations have basically bought and paid for most politicians, it’s highly unlikely that will happen any time soon.”

Sources:

<http://ringoffireradio.com>

<http://sunlightfoundation.com>

<http://influenceexplorer.com>

<http://www.opensecrets.org>

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