Distinct Problem and Its Impacts

A government that creates policy for the people they represent, because the people they represent elected this government. Sounds pretty simple, how hard could it be? As you might have guessed its not as easy as it sounds. This goal of a perfect political system is idealistic, a point in space infinitely far away; although we can move closer, we will never reach our destination. It has been our goal to move closer and closer towards a perfect democracy, but with the hands of capitalism and the ultra-wealthy at the controls, our trajectory is altered. We move closer, but at a slower pace, and should their grip grow tighter, we may start to move farther away.

This distortion of our democracy has everything to do with money in politics. From lobbying to journalism and even to our elections, money holds power in many capacities. The closest connection between money and our political system is campaign financing. While campaigns who spend more money do not always win elections, the general growth in campaign spending affects policy once elections are won.

Candidates must spend more and more money to be competitive within the election, and because of this they rely more and more on the corporations that fund them. Should these congressmen, or presidents, wish to get reelected, there is an incentive to act in the interest of the large corporations whose money gives them a fighting chance in an election. This phenomenon inherently corrupts our political system.

A brief example of this. Defense company Lockheed Martin has only increased political spending since the year 1990, going from 400 thousand dollars in 1990 all the way to over 3 million in 2016. Unites states military spending increased by 250 billion dollars per year over that period of time. A great deal of military spending has been declared by even the military itself as “unnessescary”. Campaign finance may be to blame.

In the year 2002 their was a bipartisan bill to govern corporate spending on campaigns, referred to as the McCain-Feingold Act, which banned “soft money” (giving it to the political party, spending it on ads or other campaign expenses without direct donation). But the supreme court ruled that it infringed on corporation’s constitutional right to free speech in 2010 in the Citizens United vs FEC case. This reinforced what had already become the status quo, millions of millions of dollars being poured into our elections, corrupting the system by their nature.

Specific Claim

So how do we fix it? Many think that a reversal of the Citizens United case will “Get money out of politics.” However, this solution is not feasible, nor will it be the most effective. This court ruling is not responsible for the current state of campaign finance, and thus its reversal will not prevent corporate spending to influence elections.

Similarly to other effective movements of our time, such as the movement for gun rights, and the one for gay marriage, the movement for publicly funded elections should begin on a small scale, and expand and grow until the supreme court is forced to determine if the laws that states have already begun enforcing is constitutional.

Seattle has made an interesting move in order to move farther away from privately funded elections towards ones funded by the populous. In Seattle, individuals get 4 vouchers worth 25 dollars each (a total of 100 dollars) to donate to the politicians of their choosing.

As a first step, the state of Oregon should implement “Democracy Vouchers”, like Seattle, allowing for individuals to hold more power in campaign financing, because corporations’ right to unlimited independent expenditures gives them more political power than individuals, which is a corrupt self-governance that does not serve the interests of the population at large.