Lean to the Green: The nexuses of unlimited campaign $$, voting rights, and the environmental movement

Presented By: Jon Fox, Friends of the Earth for Democracy Awakening
What will we cover?

• Why is our political system not working?

1. Money, politics, and the environment.
   • How $$$ impacts the environment.
   • Addressing the problem of $$$ in politics.

2. Voting rights and the environment.
   • How suppressing the vote impacts the environment.
   • Protecting the vote and the environment.

2016: Year of action reclaiming our Democracy
We can all agree that our political system isn’t working as well as it should, in meeting the needs of our community or in addressing global environmental challenges.

We have the power to fix this problem and make environmental policy-making more responsive and effective.
Why?
How it should be

Likelihood to become law/policy

Issue Popularity
How it is

Likelihood to become law/policy vs. Issue Popularity

- The pink line indicates a positive correlation, suggesting that as issue popularity increases, the likelihood of becoming law/policy also increases.
- The green line suggests a constant but low likelihood regardless of issue popularity.
More than two-thirds of Americans want to see the government address global warming, but the Congress resists that agenda at every turn.

So...

The problem is that the views of those in office don’t reflect the views of voters across the country.
How?

I. Money in Politics
II. Suppressing the Vote
I. Money in Politics & the Environment
In a one-two punch, the U.S. Supreme Court’s conservative majority struck down protections for voting rights as well as common sense checks on money’s influence in decisions like Citizens United, Shelby County, and McCutcheon.
Political influence in the USA:

- Super PACs
- Lobbyists
- Businesses

Voters

Power
Super PACs, secret money, and multi-million dollar contributions are very recent phenomena. Only a few years ago, there were no federal super PACs.

Source: Center for Responsive Politics
Wealthy special interests have too much influence shaping environmental policy. They care about their bottom line, not the health of our planet.

Last year, ExxonMobil spent $12.6 million lobbying in D.C. to keep poisoning our air.

#FightBigMoney
Buying Power

• Candidate campaign contributions,
• Outside campaign support (Super PACs),
• External legislative support (ALEC),
• Revolving door.

74% of MONSANTO lobbyists in 2013-2014 have previously held government jobs.

#FightBigMoney
Fun Fact!!

Running for office has become so expensive that it is nearly impossible for an everyday American to get elected to represent their community in places that do not have public and small donor campaign finance programs.

In 2014 candidates for U.S. House of Representatives had to raise $1,800 a day to raise the median amount spent by winning candidates. Senate candidates had to fund raise $3,300 a day.
How *Citizens United* & unlimited campaign $$$ impacts the environment
#1: Keeps Pollution

Last year Big Oil and Gas spent more than $242 million lobbying in DC to keep on polluting. U.S. Senators who rejected human-caused climate change and rejected new EPA regulations received seven times as much money from Big Oil & Gas interests.
All but one of the U.S. Representatives who took money from Bayer, voted to block GMO food labeling via the DARK Act in 2015.
In 2014, Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) and Sen. Jeff Flake (R-AZ) snuck a rider into a must-pass appropriations bill transferring the sacred Oak flat area in the Tonto National Forest to a foreign mining company.
#4: Legislative attacks on environmental protections

113th Congress votes against the planet:

- 44 votes to block action on climate change
- 88 votes attacking public lands & wilderness
- 68 attacks on the Clean Water Act
- 44 attempts to weaken the Clean Air Act
Addressing Money in Politics
1. Public campaign finance:
Ensures that qualified people who can take on environmental issues aren’t excluded by the high cost of campaigns or dependant on a handful of mega donors.
Public finance realigns candidates’ focus back to ordinary citizen voters and away from powerful private interests.

When Diane Russell first ran for Maine’s State House in 2008, she was working as a cashier at a local convenience store.

Maine’s small donor public campaign matching empowered Russell to gather small donations from her community, run a viable race and WIN.
2. Corporate political transparency
We must require robust and **full disclosure of corporate political spending** so voters know who is spending money to persuade voters and influence our representatives.
3. Overturning *Citizens United*: We must ratify a constitutional amendment to overturn *Citizens United, Buckley v. Valeo*, and related cases to set common sense rules and limits for campaign donations and spending.

**Corporations ARE NOT people.**
4. Tough enforcement of campaign finance laws:

We must ensure enforcement agencies have authority to crack down on donors and politicians who violate campaign laws, and hold them accountable.
II. Voting Rights and the Environment
To protect the environment, we need our voices to be heard.

Democracy works best when everyone participates and every vote counts. But today’s barriers keep regular Americans out of the political process, from voting to running for office.
How to suppress the vote?

- Voter ID laws
- Gerrymandering
- Restricting access
As of July 2015, 22 states had enacted new laws making it harder for Americans to vote.

94% of Electoral College
Laws restricting citizens’ opportunity to vote:

1. **Voter IDs:**
   - Alabama, Kansas, and Tennessee require voters to provide **proof of citizenship** when registering to vote.
   - **Wisconsin** enacted one of the strictest voter ID laws in the country.

2. **Restrict access:**
   - Florida, Illinois, Texas, and Virginia have laws curbing **registration drives**.
   - North Carolina and Nebraska have laws eliminating **same-day registration**.
Voter suppression efforts disproportionately impact constituencies who are more likely to support progressive environmental policies.
Gerrymandering Explained

50 people

60% blue, 40% red

1. Perfect representation

3 blue districts, 2 red districts

BLUE WINS

2. Compact, but unfair

5 blue districts, 0 red districts

BLUE WINS

3. Neither compact nor fair

2 blue districts, 3 red districts

RED WINS
Gerrymandering - Illinois’ 4th district, aka “Latin Earmuffs”

State lawmakers packed as many Hispanic voters as possible, to maintain the seat of a Latino incumbent.
Money in politics and policies that suppress popular voting have a similar impact: they preserve the entrenched political power of white rich men and to prevent a younger, more diverse America from electing officials who listen to our environmental concerns.
Protecting the Vote, protecting the environment
1. Setup modern, universal, and automatic voter registration
2. Prevent practices designed to discourage people from the ballot box
3. Eliminate barriers so every voice is heard
4. Support non-partisan re-districting commissions
31 states now have online voter registration.

15 states + DC now have election-day registration.

Since 2010, more than 5 million people have signed petitions supporting a constitutional amendment to overturn *Citizens United*.

23 states have taken action to shine a light on the big donors influencing elections, since 2010.

Oregon and California both passed automatic voter registration, creating default opt-in system for voter registration based on their Department of Motor Vehicles databases.
2016: Year of action reclaiming our Democracy

“As long as our government is controlled by corporate interests, we’ll never be able to protect our food, ban fracking, or prevent disasters like we’ve seen in Flint.”

Wenonah Hauter, Executive Director of Food & Water Watch
http://democracyawakening.org
#DemocracyAwakening

16-18 April 2016, week of action including the largest civil disobedience in a generation.

The campaign will begin with a march from the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia to Washington D.C. where thousands will gather in a powerful, peaceful, and massive sit-in that no one can ignore.
Americans will call on Congress to take immediate action to ensure our government is truly of, by, and for the people, not wealthy special interests.

Specifically, we will call for support of the following:

1) Fair consideration of the nominee to fill the Supreme Court vacancy, including timely hearings and a vote by the full Senate.

2) Protect voting rights across the nation.
   • The Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R. 2867, S. 1659), legislation that would restore the protections against voting discrimination that were struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in its Shelby County v. Holder
   • The Voter Empowerment Act (H.R. 12), legislation to modernize voter registration, prevent deceptive practices that keep people from the ballot

3) Enact commonsense limits on money in elections.
   • The Democracy For All Amendment (H.J.Res. 22, S.J.Res. 5), a constitutional amendment that would overturn Citizens United and place commonsense limits on money in elections.
   • The Government By the People Act/Fair Elections Now Act (H.R. 20 and S. 1538), a small donor empowerment measure
We’ve successfully addressed enormous environmental issues before, whether it was cleaning up major rivers or preserving our national parks or improving the air quality that effected millions in major cities.

We will do it again! We will reduce the influence of money in politics and protect our voting rights so that our elected officials reflect the environmental values of those that elect them.
Questions or comments?

Please email to Democracy@FoE.Org

Or visit www.foe.org/democracy

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