

Dollars and Votes: How Business Campaign Contributions Subvert Democracy

Dan Clawson, Alan Neustadtl, Mark Weller



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Recent scandals, including questionable fund-raising tactics by the current administration, have brought campaign finance reform into the forefront of the news and the public consciousness. "Dollars and Votes" goes beyond the partial, often misleading, news stories and official records to explain how our campaign system operates. The authors conducted thorough interviews with corporate "government relations" officials about what they do and why they do it. The results provide some of the most damning evidence imaginable. What donors, especially business donors, expect for their money is "access" and access means a lot more than a chance to meet and talk. They count on secret behind-the-scenes deals, like a tax provision that applies only to a "corporation incorporated on June 13, 1917, which has its principal place of business in Bartlesville, Oklahoma". After a deal is worked out behind closed doors, one executive explains, "it doesn't much matter how people vote afterwards". Ordinary contributions give access to Congress; megabuck "soft money" contributions ensure access to the President and top leaders. The striking truth revealed by these authors is that half the soft money comes from fewer than five hundred big donors, and that most contributions come, directly or indirectly, from business. Reform is possible, they argue, by turning away from the temptation of looking at specific scandals and developing a new system that removes the influence of big money campaign contributors. Author note: Dan Clawson, Professor of Sociology, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, is the author of "Bureaucracy and the Labor Process" and past editor of "Contemporary Sociology". Alan Neustadtl, Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland, is the co-author (with Dan Clawson and Denise Scott) of "Money Talks: Corporate PACs and Political Infuence". Mark Weller teaches sociology at San Jose State.

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