

MONEY IN POLITICS

The significance of money in politics

Over the past several years, the growing role of political contributions in elections has significantly changed the way both campaigning and politics work. Elections today are flooded with money, and candidates must constantly vie for contributions to avoid being outspent by other candidates. Many elected officials are now deeply dependent on donations from large donors, so much so that they must constantly fundraise, even in off-election years. The result is that politicians, however well-intentioned, are incentivized to put the interests and time of those with the most means above the concerns of all of their constituents.

When we talk about how money works in politics, we must **take special care to ensure that the most marginalized of God's children are included in the public discussion.** Political leaders should focus on the constituents they represent, rather than just the select few who make the largest financial contributions.

In the past decade, we have seen the corrosive effect of money in politics. In the 2016 presidential election, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) measured [more than \\$1.5 billion](#) spent in campaigning just among presidential candidates. Supreme Court decisions, such as *Citizens United v. FEC*, have enabled higher contribution limits and decreased spending transparency. The continuous need for elected officials to fundraise has serious consequences. Legislators may even [spend more time fundraising than visiting](#) with constituents or legislating during their work week.

Every citizen should have the opportunity to play a free and active part in the foundation of our communities, rather than limiting this ability to the few who have the financial wealth and resources at their disposal. **If only those with the most means can afford to have their voices heard, we not only cease to be a democracy, but we also silence the most marginalized members of our communities.**

Our Lutheran voice

Lutherans are steeped in a faith tradition that compels us to advocate and work toward good governance. We recognize public service as a worthy calling, one that should not be hindered by the over influence of money in politics.



Available by action of the 2019 Churchwide Assembly and adopted in June 2020, the [ELCA social message "Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy"](#) speaks to the importance of good governance for civic life. "Human dignity means all persons have claim on the protection, care, and concern for equity that government should provide" (p. 7). Although no simple answer is anticipated, to evaluate proper work of government, "Lutherans ask one simple but all-encompassing question: is the neighbor being served?" (p. 9). Unrestricted participation is a guide to assess this performance, but "The political health of our nation still suffers from the stain of antidemocratic exclusion" (p. 10).

MONEY IN POLITICS *continued*

Our current system keeps well-meaning and dedicated public servants from performing their duties as they ought; there is increasing pressure, because of the distorted role that money plays in elections and politics, for elected officials to listen to a few large donors rather than to their entire constituency. This marginalizes poor and middle-class constituents and, in turn, damages our democracy.

Money in politics affects nearly every aspect of our public and moral life: from investments in public programs, to social policies, our international reputation, and – most especially – our ability to ensure moral responsibility at the highest levels of government. In keeping with the [ELCA social statement on economic life](#), it is crucial to our faith that we do not let money dominate our lives or block the critical efforts of our communities and ministries. When public officials are driven to serve money more than their constituents, there is a failure to uphold that moral responsibility.

Many religious traditions and teachings inspire us to continually strive for a more just democratic system that includes all of our siblings. Faithful justice is achieved through a multiplicity of voices, not just the voices of a few.



Policies and reforms that help

We ask for legislation that will empower state and federal lawmakers to set reasonable limits on campaign contributions, increase transparency in our elections, and stop the flood of corporate and super PAC money from political action committees that distorts the political debate and influences our representatives. We support policies and reforms that help:

- Enhance transparency and increase public awareness of campaign contributions
- Expand access for citizens across the economic spectrum to run for political office.
- Foster increased citizen participation in public discussion and encourage higher voter turnout
- Reduce the influence of money in shaping political debates and media

Learn More!

[Center for Political Accountability](#): A nonprofit dedicated to increasing transparency disclosure and board oversight of company spending

Congressional Research Service: [“The State of Campaign Finance Policy”](#)

Auburn Seminary Theological Report [“Lo\\$ing faith in our democracy”](#)

ELCA social statement [“Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All”](#)

ELCA social policy resolution on campaign finance: [U.S. Election Campaign Finance Reform](#)