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To: Friends of Democracy Corps and Every Voice

From: Stan Greenberg and James Carville, Democracy Corps  
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### **An Idea Whose Time Has Come:**

**Battling big money in the Senate battleground with real consequences for 2014**

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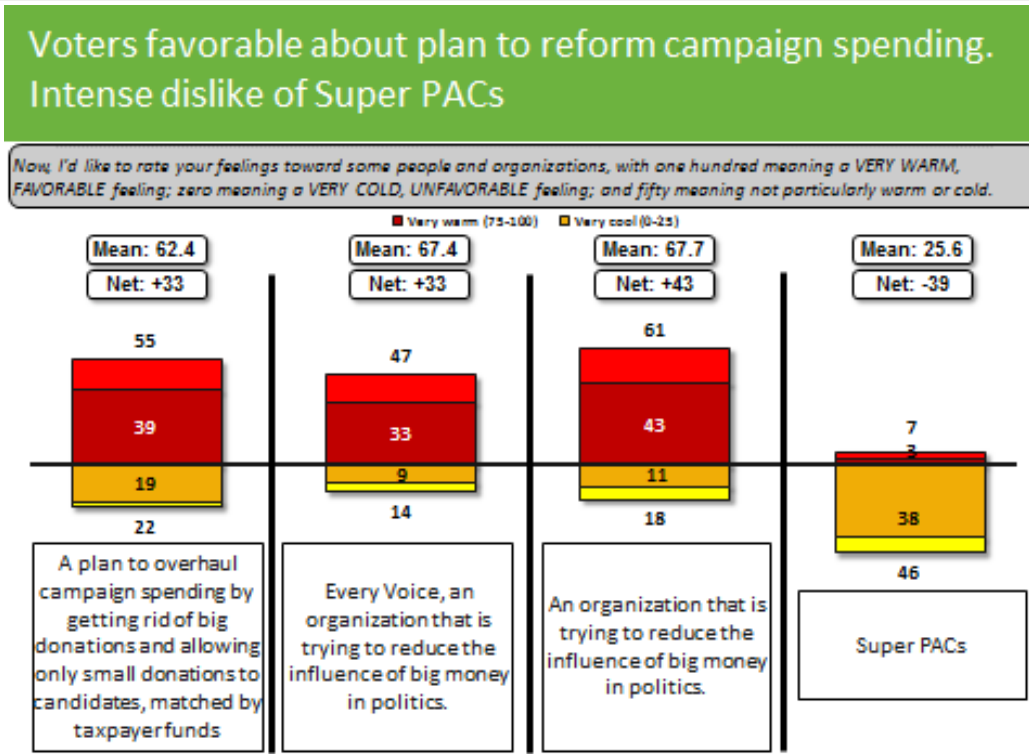
The Senate battleground states this year will not simply decide the balance of power in the U.S. Senate; the voters in these states will be exposed to the new era of campaigns fought out with huge expenditures by outside groups, with significant portions in undisclosed funds, and the increased pressure placed on Senate candidates to raise more money than ever before. Already this year, \$77 million has been spent by outside groups in Senate races around the country. The big issue for Every Voice, a new major advocacy effort, is how ordinary citizens are reacting to this era of increased campaign spending and whether political leaders who challenge the *status quo* and engage this issue can win more support.

Every Voice commissioned Democracy Corps to conduct this survey in the 12 most competitive Senate Battleground states. The results show a very disaffected electorate that currently divides its votes and feelings about the parties very evenly – despite these states supporting Romney by 9 points in 2012.<sup>1</sup>

Voters of all political persuasions believe the \$77 million spent by outside groups and Super PACS on advertising is “wrong” and leads officials to represent “wealthy donors,” not ordinary voters. They reject the idea that this is now business as usual. That rejection produces a deep hostility to Super PACs and strong support for plans to reduce overall campaign spending and a constitutional amendment to overturn *Citizens United*. Candidates who battle to reduce the influence of big money and for changes that empower the ordinary citizen gain electorally.

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<sup>1</sup> The survey among 1,000 likely 2014 voters was conducted from July 12-16, 2014 using a list of 2006 voters, 2010 voters, and new registrants. Unless otherwise noted, the margin of error for the full sample is = +/- 3.10% at 95% confidence.



In a simulated debate on the Constitutional amendment and a small donor public financing program with arguments on both sides attributed to the actual candidates, the pro-reform candidate gains a net five points, with the gains concentrated among swing center-right groups. Clearly, the debate around these issues puts Republicans – who have largely opposed the measures – squarely on the wrong side of public opinion. In fact, the Republican Party establishment’s current positions on numerous campaign finance issues represent a vulnerability – at a time of deep disaffection with Washington and both parties.

When combined with a strong populist economic message, which we detailed in a previous release,<sup>2</sup> inserting the money in politics narrative has the potential to significantly improve the electoral fortunes of Democratic candidates in the Senate battleground, if they seize the reform mantle.

**Key findings:**

- There is an intensely Anti-Washington mood in the Senate battleground.
- Voters are strongly negative towards Super PACs and believe spending in politics this year is worse than in the past and is very corrupting.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.democracycorps.com/Battleground-Surveys/economic-agenda-for-working-women-and-men-the-difference-in-the-senate-battleground/>



- There is overwhelming cross-partisan support of a Constitutional amendment to overturn *Citizens United* that can translate into added support for Democratic candidates who support the amendment and damage Republicans who oppose it.
- Importantly, there is more than two-to-one support for a plan to provide limited public matching funds for small donations to candidates who reject big donations. Support holds steady after balanced debate on the proposal even in the face of accusations that supporters favor wasting tax dollars on a “welfare for politicians” scheme.
- Republican candidates supporting the RNC lawsuit to eliminate individual contribution limits put themselves in danger of losing support.
- Engaging in a debate about money in politics, when it includes both a push to overturn *Citizens United* and the matching funds campaign finance proposal, moves the Senate vote a net 5 points towards Democrats.

### **The context: A split Senate vote and intensely anti-Washington mood**

The Senate battleground starts as a very tight race: the 46-44 percent lead for the Republican candidates is within the margin of error and unchanged from an NPR survey conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner and Resurgent Republican in early June.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps more important, 70 percent of voters now say the country is off on the wrong track while just 24 percent say it is headed in the right direction. And voters in this Republican-leaning battleground (it voted for Romney by an average of 9 points in 2012) have dismal views of both parties and of both parties’ Senate leaders.

Right now, Democratic candidates are struggling with their base: unmarried women and younger voters are surprisingly competitive, even when accounting for the Republican tilt to these states. But, as we detailed in a report last week, an economic message centered around helping working women and men moves the vote from a 2-point disadvantage for Democrats into a dead-tie. But these small gains mask important, larger movement among some key groups. At the heart of this shift are unmarried women, whose margin jumps from 11 to 20 points, matching the 2010 national margin (but still below 2012). By the end of the messaging, Democrats and Republicans have solid bases and are tied across the battleground, including the open-seats where Democrats start at a disadvantage.

But voters, including independents and swing voters, are ready to hear something more.

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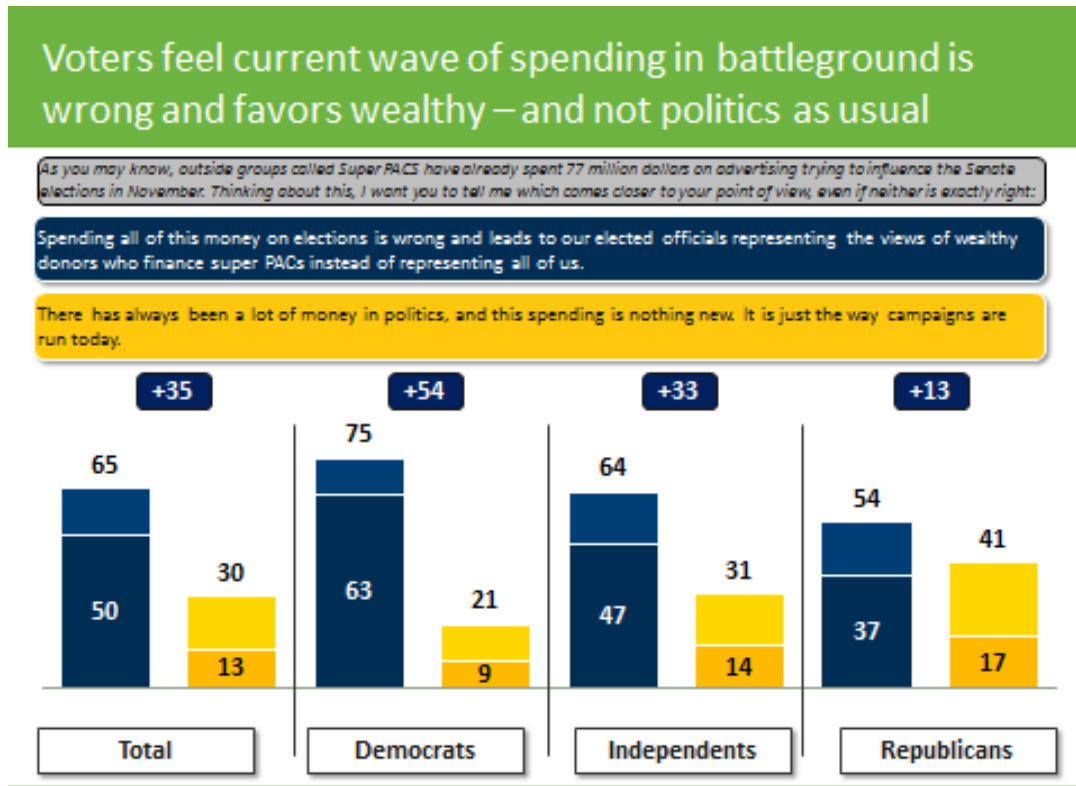
<sup>3</sup> The survey among 1,000 randomly dialed voters was conducted from June 6-11, 2014. Unless otherwise noted, the margin of error for the full sample is = +/- 3.10% at 95% confidence.



**Voters in the cross hairs are deeply unhappy with big money’s new role**

Voters across the political spectrum do not view the status quo in campaign spending as acceptable or business as usual and seem ready to reward leaders who take on the fight.

By a 65-30 percent majority, voters in the Senate battleground believe that the current system is wrong and leads to our elected officials representing the will of wealthy donors who finance Super PACs, while rejecting the argument that all of this spending is nothing new. Business as usual is not a valid excuse.



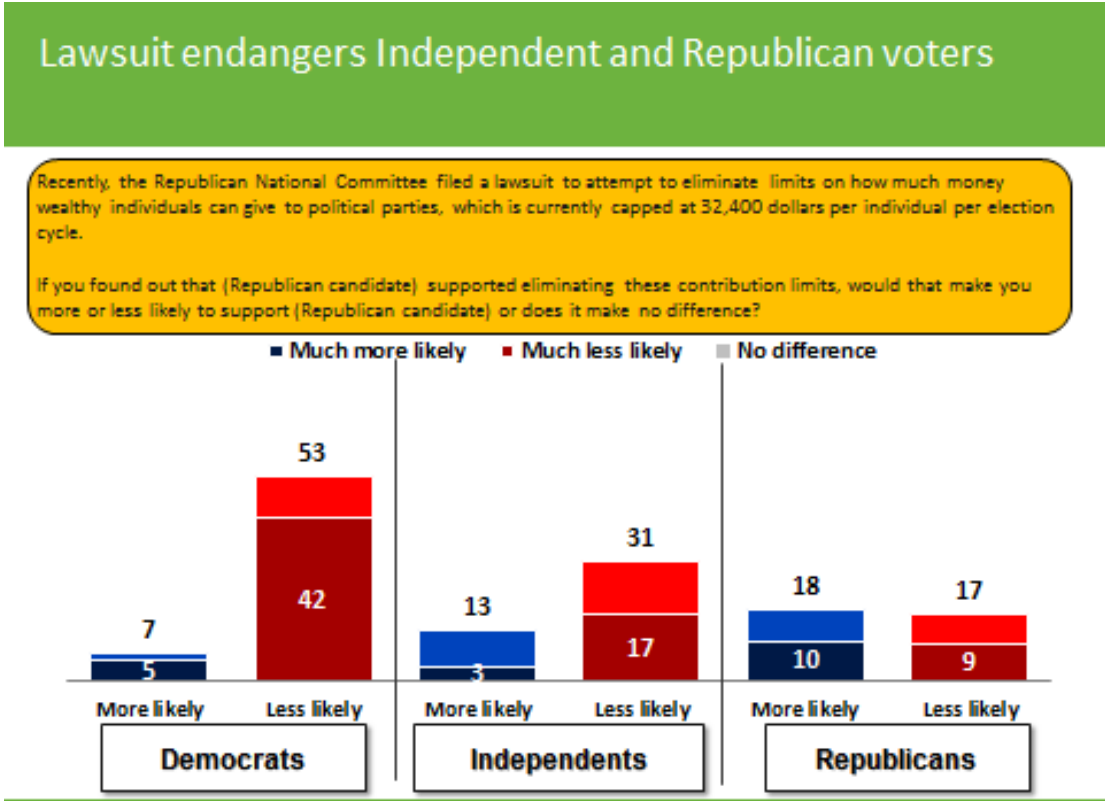
As we have been reporting for years, voters are deeply unhappy with money in politics: The recent *Citizens United* and *McCutcheon* rulings certainly do not help. Super PACs are detested, with a seven to one negative to positive favorability ratio. Meanwhile, a plan to overhaul campaign spending by getting rid of big donations and an organization that is dedicated to reducing the influence of money in politics both get overwhelmingly positive responses across party lines.

Not surprisingly, Republican efforts to defend big money are an increasing liability. The Republican National Committee’s current effort to remove caps on the amount individual donors can give to political parties make two and half times as many voters less likely to vote for a candidate who supports these efforts (34 percent) rather than more likely (13 percent). This includes an 18-point difference among independents and a 33-point difference among millennials.



**A Constitutional amendment to overturn *Citizens United***

With such a fertile setting, support for reform grows easily. One option we tested is a Constitutional Amendment to overturn the *Citizens United* ruling. Voters support such an amendment by an overwhelming 73 to 24 percent margin, including majorities in even the reddest states. This includes a 56-point advantage among independents and a 26-point margin among Republicans. Support was equal across states that voted for Obama and for Romney in 2012. This is broad and deep support on a controversial issue, the kind that we rarely see in our hyper-partisan climate.

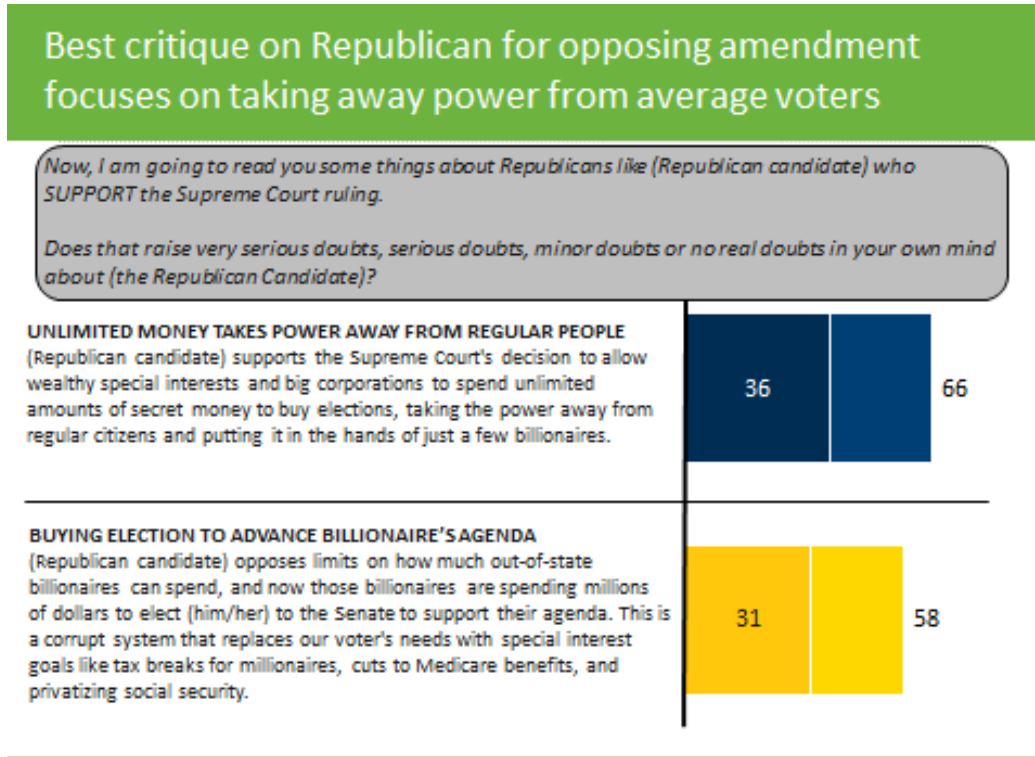


Democratic candidates can gain from supporting this amendment. A 48-11 percent plurality of voters says they are more likely to support the named Democratic candidate after hearing an argument for the proposal. This represents broad support, as the number actually increases among voters under 50 to a 41-point gap and among independents to 42 points.

Meanwhile, arguments that highlight Republican opposition to the amendment and their support of big, secret money, prove potent. Two-thirds of battleground voters have serious doubts about Republicans after hearing they support *Citizens United*. In open-seats, this number rises to 72 percent, while strong majorities of independents, men, women, and voters of every age now share doubts about Republicans by simply restating one of their fundamental positions. Even a majority of Republican voters have serious doubts after hearing about their candidate’s support for the *Citizens United* decision.



Connecting policy positions, like tax breaks for the wealthy and cuts to Medicare, to the billionaires funding outside campaigns is similarly effective. Again, majorities across ideology, geography, gender, and age agree with the basic premise that this election is being bought by billionaires, and that Republicans are the ones doing the selling.



These are not new ideas: the connections between politicians and big money, ranging from the Koch brothers to oil companies to big banks, have been major talking points in the political debate for years. But showing that the system is rigged – and, importantly, offering a clear reform alternative – provides a powerful way to make this a pivotal issue in November. All pro-reform Democrats have to do is use it.

### A proposal for public funding

Just as important, voters strongly support a plan to limit the influence of money in politics by providing public matching funds for small donations to candidates who swear off large donations (by a 66 to 27 percent margin). While we may start to sound like a broken record, the support for this proposal extends across the electorate. Strong majorities of not just independents (63 percent), but even Republicans (58 percent) support this proposal, while key swing groups like millennials and undecided Senate voters are even more supportive.

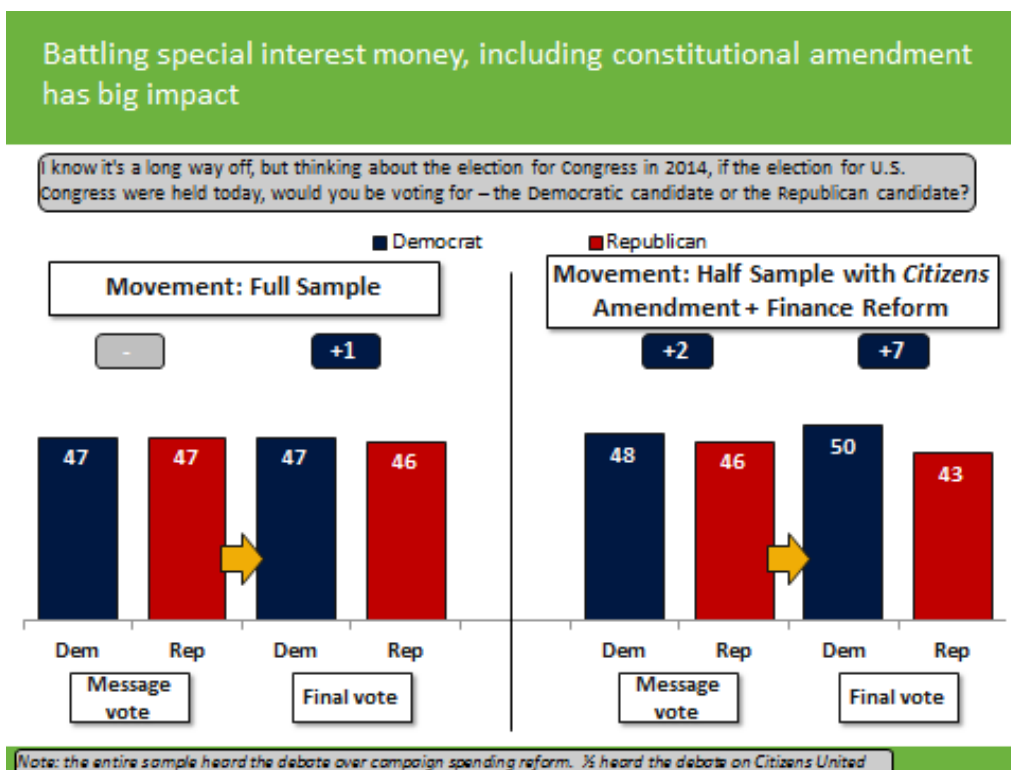
Presented with competing statements that represent both sides of the argument on this proposal, 59 percent side with proponents of the proposal, including (again) a majority of Republicans and independents. We've already shown that voters are disgusted with Super PACs and that even the briefest description of reform gains strong majority support. Now we have real numbers show-



ing real support for a system of campaign finance that dramatically redefines how our elections would work – and root-and-branch reform is what people want.

**Electoral impact of the debate**

Perhaps most important, the simulated debate moves the vote further towards the Democrats overall, but the impact is magnified when the Constitutional amendment on *Citizens United* enters the discussion. Voters, in a split-sample exercise, that heard messages about both the public financing and *Citizens United* (only half the sample hear the *Citizens United* portion) moved a net 5 points more (on top of the 2-point movement from economic messaging), resulting in a 7-point lead for Democrats – a net 9-point reversal from the 2-point deficit they began the survey with.



This movement is not the same as what we saw in the economic messaging; while that messaging shored up the Democratic base, this messaging reaches out to critical swing electoral groups. Independent women, voters in open senate seats, voters under 50, and liberal or moderate Republicans all moved by at least 8 points towards the Democratic candidates while a majority of voters that heard the *Citizens United* debate now support the Democratic candidate.

There is real power in the populist, economic message for working women and men – but a populist attack on the role of big money and embrace of reforms to make government respond to the ordinary citizen goes a critical step further.



**Appendix A: Battleground State List and Definitions**

**Battleground States**

States	Incumbent	2012 Presidential margin
Alaska	Mark Begich	Romney +14.0
Arkansas	Mark Pryor	Romney +23.6
Colorado	Mark Udall	Obama +4.7
Georgia	OPEN (Chambliss)	Romney +8.0
Iowa	OPEN (Harkin)	Obama +5.6
Kentucky	Mitch McConnell	Romney +22.7
Louisiana	Mary Landreiu	Romney +17.2
Michigan	OPEN (Levin)	Obama +9.5
Montana	John Walsh	Romney +13.5
New Hampshire	Jeanne Shaheen	Obama +5.8
North Carolina	Kay Hagan	Romney +2.2
West Virginia	OPEN (Rockefeller)	Romney +26.8

Regional	2012 Presidential Result	Competitive Tier
<b>Midwest and East</b>	<b>Won by Romney</b>	<b>Tier 1 (Most Dem)</b>
Iowa	Alaska	Colorado
Michigan	Arkansas	Michigan
New Hampshire	Georgia	New Hampshire
West Virginia	Kentucky	North Carolina
<b>West</b>	Louisiana	<b>Tier 2</b>
Alaska	Montana	Alaska
Colorado	North Carolina	Arkansas
Montana	West Virginia	Iowa
<b>South</b>	<b>Won by Obama</b>	Louisiana
Arkansas	Colorado	<b>Tier 3 (Most Rep)</b>
Georgia	Iowa	Georgia
Kentucky	Michigan	Montana
Louisiana	New Hampshire	Kentucky
North Carolina		West Virginia