

Year Of Dramatic Campaign Spending Increases Marks Anniversary Of Citizens United Decision

By **Andrew Doughman** / [Nevada News Bureau](#)

One year later, the impacts of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the Citizens United case are plain to see.

On Jan. 21, 2010, the court ruled that corporate and union donations to political candidates cannot be limited under the First Amendment.

The impact?

During this past Senatorial election, Democratic-incumbent Harry Reid and Republican challenger Sharron Angle together spent about [\\$44 million](#) on their campaigns. Including outside spending, that number is probably above [\\$50 million](#). That's compared to about [\\$8 million](#) spent during the 2004 and 2006 Senate races, when campaign financing laws were still on the books.

At the Congressional level, Democrat Dina Titus and Republican Joe Heck battled it out this year, spending a combined [\\$4 million](#) in a contest Heck ultimately won. That's actually less than the [\\$4.65 million](#) spent in the 2008 race between Titus and Republican-challenger Jon Porter. But outside spending in the 2010 race accounted for an [extra \\$4.5 million](#) in 2010 compared to [\\$1.8 million](#) in 2008.

In a 5-4 decision, the Supreme Court struck down a provision of those financing laws in [Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission](#).

In striking parts of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act – better known as the [McCain-Feingold Act](#) – the court allowed corporate donors to give unlimited amounts of money to political candidates or to spend independently on behalf of candidates. The spending numbers above only track the spending declared by candidates, excluding money spent on their behalf. In the Reid-Angle race, many of the donors to Angle's campaign [were individuals](#), whereas Reid raked in donations for corporations.

Following the ruling, President Barack Obama [said](#) the ruling "gives the special interests and their lobbyists even more power in Washington ... while undermining the influence of average Americans who make small contributions to their preferred candidates."

His 2008 Republican opponent, Sen. John McCain, [also criticized](#) the decision. Along with Sen. Russ Feingold, D-Wisconsin, McCain had been a sponsor of the campaign reform law, the provisions of which the court struck down.

Former state Senator Bill Raggio, in an interview on the [Nevada NewsMakers](#) program on Jan. 13, also questioned the high level of spending on campaigns in

general and in the Reid-Angle race in particular: "I think the money that is spent on campaigns, particularly this last campaign season, was obscene. In just this state alone, \$50 million between these two candidates for the U.S. Senate.

"I certainly want to support free speech and the ability of people to back candidates and to fund candidates, but I think there should be some reasonable limit. It may be something that has to be self imposed by individuals or candidates or groups, but I think it was obscene."

[Other groups](#), however, praised the ruling. The National Rifle Association and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce had both supported Citizens United during the trial. The Cato Institute, a conservative think tank, also issued a statement in support.

"To make campaign spending equal or nearly so, the government would have to force some people or groups to spend less than they wished. And equality of speech is inherently contrary to protecting speech from government restraint," the [statement](#) read.

To mark the one-year anniversary of the decision, Citizens United released a celebratory statement today. Their lead counsel in the case, Theodore B. Olson, said that the decision is the "most important in history."

"What that decision said is that individuals, under the First Amendment, cannot be inhibited, cannot be restrained, cannot be threatened, cannot be censored by the government when they wish to speak about elections and the political process," he said. "What could be more important than that?"

One year later, the rancor aroused by the decision appears not to have quieted. Republicans are pushing for removing more campaign financing restrictions while Democrats are lining up to [propose a constitutional amendment](#) to limit corporate spending.