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## Senator Elizabeth Warren condemns dark money in politics

April 24, 2018

In a speech delivered today on the Senate floor, United States Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) spoke out against the power of dark money in our political system and how the influence of wealthy, anti-union groups hurt American workers.

“Though the economy has improved, America’s middle class is being left behind,” says Lisa McCormick, the New Jersey Democrat who is challenging Senator Robert Menendez in the upcoming primary election. “Despite the booming stock market and declining unemployment, America’s middle class is in trouble. Ronald Reagan’s trickle down economic theory has failed the middle class, so an average family makes less money than a generation ago.”

In her remarks, Warren outlined how dark money donors such as the Koch Brothers set up seemingly apolitical, unbiased “think tanks” in order to push legislation that only benefits the rich and powerful while leaving everyone else behind.

Warren’s speech was one of a series of speeches given this week by Senate Democrats to shine a light on the dark web of billionaires and special interests who have their hands tightly gripped on our democracy.

“The cancer in our society is money in politics,” said Lou Weisbach, CEO of Merch Time, and the former chairman of the Jefferson Trust for the Democratic National Committee. “It is the issue that politicians tout as a terrible evil in virtually every campaign but rarely dare touch once elected.”

“The cancer, of course, is on both sides of the aisle,” said Weisbach. “The amount of money being donated to elect politicians is astonishing. Special interest groups and wealthy individuals would not be donating massive amounts to PACs and politicians unless they believed they would receive favorable returns on their investments.”

“We desperately need a constitutional amendment making it unlawful for any individual, corporation, PAC, or other organization or entity to provide, directly or indirectly, funds or favors to any politician, political party, or political campaign under any circumstances,” said Weisbach, echoing McCormick, who says she wants to “outlaw bribery in all its forms.”

In the last campaign cycle, \$176 million of outside spending came from groups that don't have to disclose their donors, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

Menendez raised \$7.4 million for his re-election, according to recent Federal Election Commission filings.

Menendez had been indicted in April 2015 on charges that he intervened improperly with federal agencies on behalf of Dr. Salomon Melgen, a campaign donor who was convicted in the nation's biggest Medicare fraud case.

His first trial ended in a hung jury and subsequent mistrial, and federal prosecutors dropped the charges in January after first saying they would retry him. He still is under investigation by the Senate Ethics Committee.

The full text of Warren's remarks is below.

***Remarks by Senator Elizabeth Warren  
April 24, 2018***

*Mr. President, I'd like to take a moment to thank Senator Whitehouse for his bold leadership and continuing the fight to rid our political system of dark money.*

*All across our country, teachers are taking to the streets to demand what no teacher should ever have to ask for: fair pay and decent benefits.*

*In state after state, education has been cut to the bone—shoot they have even cut the bone. Kids are crammed into overcrowded classrooms. They are handed tattered textbooks. And their teachers are paid so little that some qualify for food stamps. In fact, salaries are so low in some states that teachers are working two, three and sometimes four jobs just to make ends meet.*

*Now, many people don't know this but teachers have always had a special place in my heart. As a little girl growing up in Oklahoma, there was one person I admired more than anyone else in the world — my second grade teacher, Mrs. Lee.*

*I will never forget the day Mrs. Lee took me aside and explained that if I worked hard, I could become a teacher too. Those words changed my life. Today, I am the daughter of a maintenance man who became a teacher, a professor, and a United States Senator because America invested in teachers like Mrs. Lee and that meant investing in the thousands of students that she reached through the years.*

*I am grateful to that America, I believe in that America. But I'll be honest, I am scared to death that our children and grandchildren may never know that America. Right now, in one of the richest nations on the planet, American teachers are getting crushed.*

*I want to tell you about one of those teachers. Jonathan Moy, or Mr. Moy as his students call him, he's a teacher in Oklahoma. Every week Mr. Moy juggles six jobs in addition to teaching. Mr. Moy coaches two sports teams, drives for Uber and Lyft, drives a school bus, and umpires a little league team so that he can provide for his two daughters.*

*Sadly, Mr. Moy's story is becoming all too common. According to one estimate, teachers are five times more likely than other workers to have a second job.*

*No wonder teachers are taking to the streets in West Virginia and Oklahoma and Kentucky and Arizona. They have had enough.*

*I'm standing shoulder to shoulder with teachers across the country because they deserve better. Because our children deserve better. And because investment in teachers is an investment in our kids and ultimately an investment in our future. So, like many of my colleagues in this chamber and fellow Democrats across the country I'm in this fight for the long haul. But if we are to be successful, if we are ever to hope that we can prevail, we should be clear-eyed about what it is that we're up against.*

*The perilous state of affairs for education funding in our states is not the simple result of a bunch of legislators who, after listening to all their constituents, decided against supporting public education.*

*No, the movement of teacher protests sweeping the country has revealed corruption-corruption that Republican controlled states have been sweeping under the rug for decades. The steep cuts to education are the product of an all-out assault on our teachers and our schools that has been launched by a handful of billionaires.*

*One of the principal tools rich and powerful people use is dark money. They have created an evasive enemy that slithers out of sight, with only a glimpse here or there. But make no mistake, this dark money has helped shape the anti-teacher, anti-worker agenda that undermines our democracy.*

*For decades, billionaires have been pouring unlimited, secret money into the hands of carefully picked candidates who will do their bidding.*

*We often talk about the influence of dark money and what it has right here in Washington, but the truth is, the real battle is being fought out on the state and local level.*

*Consider the State Policy Network. SPN is an umbrella alliance of over 60 member organizations covering nearly every state in the United States. Their member organizations hide behind deceptively apolitical names, like the Platte Institute for Economic Research or the Thomas Jefferson Institute for Public Policy, but these organizations, they are anything but apolitical. These groups are the propaganda arm of right-wing billionaires. The State Policy Network, for example, is bankrolled by the Koch brothers through organizations like the Donors Trust, one of the Koch's favorite investment arms. In 2016 alone, the Donors Trust made \$20.3 million in grants to State Policy Network members.*

*In addition to affiliates, the State Policy Network has over 80 "associate members." It's a who's who of right wing, Koch-funded groups like the Americans for Prosperity Foundation, the Americans for Tax Reform Foundation, the Cato Institute, and the Heritage Foundation. Their funders also include an array of the biggest and most powerful corporations, including tobacco giant Phillip Morris, food giant Kraft, and pharma giant GlaxoSmithKline.*

*The goal of the State Policy Network and its myriad affiliates is to trick the public into thinking that they are genuine, unbiased think tanks researching public policy issues, think that instead of right-wing, billionaire-funded groups dedicated to hijacking every legislature in America and passing laws that work for their corporations while they leave everyone else behind.*

*With friends like aggressively anti-union Koch brothers, it should come as no surprise that one of the State Policy Network's top priorities is dismantling public sector unions. In a 2016 fundraising letter, the State Policy stated that its goal was to quote "defund and defang" government unions. And it bragged about the work of its affiliates to supply-and I'm quoting here again- quote "intellectual ammunition" to weaken unions in states across the country.*

*It touted its work in West Virginia, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin, in shepherding passage of laws that make it harder for unions to collect union dues that cover the costs of collective bargaining.*

*Although it focuses on state policy, the State Policy Network's agenda can have nationwide effects. Just look at the Supreme Court case Janus v. AFSCME, which will determine whether public sector unions that represent teachers and nurses and firefighters and police officers in states and cities around this country will actually be able to collect fees from workplaces they represent and that allow them to negotiate for better pay, better wages, and better working conditions. The Illinois Policy Institute, an affiliate of the State Policy Network, works closely with the groups pushing the court to cut off unions' funding and force them to represent workers who do not pay dues.*

*The State Policy Network's attack on workers is just one prong of a much larger campaign to hand government over to the rich and powerful. As one of the many tentacles of the Koch network, the State Policy Network also works to:*

- *gut environmental protections that prevent big corporations from poisoning our water, our food, and our air*
- *it works to dismantle Medicaid and other health care protections that provide vulnerable, low-income individuals with basic healthcare*
- *it works to slash income and other taxes that provide critical funds for basic government services;*
- *and it works to weaken public pensions that provide government workers with financial security in retirement*

*Billionaires and special interests are conspiring to buy our political system. We cannot allow this to happen. That's why I'm proud to join my colleagues in support of bills like the DISCLOSE Act to shine a light on the dark web of billionaires who have their hands tightly gripped around the neck of our democracy. Our government should belong to the people, not to wealthy special interests.*