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Spared change: contributions vs. influence; Citings; Brief article

By Doherty, Brian

A NOVEMBER study by Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) noted with alarm that the chairmen and ranking members of congressional committees receive lots of campaign contributions from industries affected by those committees. Not only that, but the amount of contributions grows as congressmen's power and seniority grow.

The CREW study looked at 10 committees, tracking campaign contributions to current chairmen and ranking members from the 1998 election cycle through the 2010 cycle. It found that "industry contributions to those members have skyrocketed during that period, increasing by nearly 600 percent, far more than the 230 percent increase in overall contributions to those members during the same period." CREW noted that "many committee leaders voted in agreement with the industries they regulate a majority of the time."

Despite this pattern, there is little rigorous research to support CREW's assumption that money changes votes. "Analyses of large numbers of roll-call votes," **Cato Institute** policy analyst John Samples writes in his 2006 book *The Fallacy of Campaign Finance Reform*, "find that contributions have little effect on policymaking once constituent preference and ideology (along with partisanship) are taken into account."

Samples cites numerous studies indicating that ideology matters more than cash in predicting congressional votes, and that reductions in corporate giving (to lame-duck congressmen, for example) have no noticeable effect on politicians' positions. Given that the percentage of GDP devoted to political giving has remained more or less constant across the 20th century, Samples concludes such donations are best thought of as consumption expenses, rather than investments in political results. The relatively tiny amount of money involved, around 0.02 percent of GDP, compared to the power Congress wields over industry, supports this interpretation as well.