

Air traffic funds show who rules

By: Peter Cohan - April 29, 2013

Memories of Occupy Wall Street are long in our rear-view mirrors, but its key idea lingers: That our democracy still represents the interests of the top 1 percent.

To see examples of how that works, just look at how quickly one of those policies — the decision to cut the Federal Aviation Administration’s budget — was reversed.

How did the top 1 percent hijack our government? It all began in 1964, after Republican candidate Barry Goldwater failed in his bid for the White House.

In 1971, Lewis Powell wrote a memo for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in which he advocated “a sweeping, coordinated and long-term effort to spread conservative ideas on college campuses, in academic journals and in the news media,” according to The New York Times.

This memo led to the creation of a five-level Republican pyramid. At its base were individual donors such as the Koch brothers, the Scaife family and Olin foundations. The second level consisted of conservative research centers including the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute. Level three was political strategists such as Karl Rove. The fourth level of the pyramid is the Republican news media: Fox News, Rush Limbaugh and the like. And at the top of the Republican pyramid is the presidential candidate. But, as former New Jersey Sen. Bill Bradley wrote, “Because the pyramid is stable, all you have to do is put a different top on it, and it works fine.”

As we saw in 2008 and 2012, the Republican pyramid is a little shaky. But thanks to the Supreme Court’s January 2010 decision in *Citizens United vs. The Federal Election Commission*, corporations can give unlimited funds to politicians.

One of the Republican pyramid’s think-tankers is Harvard professor Kenneth Rogoff, who supports the idea that cutting government and reducing debt is good for an ailing economy. Deficit and debt fears helped the U.S. implement an \$85 billion sequestration that kicked in March 1. Among the cuts were reductions in control-tower personnel in large and small airports across the country. These cuts caused delays — 863 delays on April 24 alone. The sequestration also cut back on the National Guard and funds for seniors who depend on Meals On Wheels and children who rely on Head Start to learn to read.

But economic policy is set by the top 1 percent. As Paul Krugman pointed out in The New York Times, economic policy goals vary depending on income level. The very wealthy believe that deficits are the biggest threat to America. And those deficits should be cut,

according to the top 1 percent, by slashing federal spending on health care and Social Security, while the average American wants spending on those programs to rise.

One thing that was not mentioned by Mr. Krugman was the views of the top 1 percent on cutting back the number of air traffic controllers. But it does not take a genius to realize that the wealthiest people are the ones who travel most on airplanes — whether in first class on a commercial flight or on their own private jets. We all have freedom of speech, but thanks to the combination of the Citizens United decision and the Republican pyramid, the people with the most money get the most powerful megaphones. On April 26, the House joined the Senate in passing a bill to add \$253 million to the FAA's budget to hire those controllers. The cuts to Meals on Wheels and the others remain intact.

Surprised?