

THE PHOENIX

Could Trump actually be right for once?

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I never thought the day would come when I found common ground with the preposterous individual that is Donald Trump, but it seems that the time has arrived. Trump and I find ourselves on the same side of an issue that has likely changed the landscape of American political elections forever: Super PACs. Super PACs are expenditure-only committees, meaning that they can donate no direct funds to a candidate or political party. However, they are able to raise unlimited funds to spend in any way they'd like, and are thus able to aid a campaign or candidate's efforts without direct association. Trump, like me, has a problem with this.

In a recent press release from Trump's campaign from Oct. 23, it was expressed that Trump wants to campaign with integrity, wholly independent of the dark money, donor class perpetuating a broken Washington, D.C. He argues that allowing corporations and interest groups to raise unlimited funds to spend towards a candidate results in a corrupt government in which candidates are in the pockets of the wealthy. It is slightly ironic that Trump seems so steadfast in his belief, as he himself has contributed over 1.4 million dollars since 1989 to campaigns, parties, and committees. At the same time, Trump has no issue with people donating to campaigns under federal individual spending limits; it's the "dark money" he has an issue with.

Dark money is described as such because donors and groups do not have to disclose their names, so the money is virtually untraceable, and these committees are subsequently unaccountable for their actions. This can result in increased, aggressive negative campaigning and, consequently, more toxic political environment.

Just this past week, Trevor Burrus, a research fellow at conservative think tank The Cato Institute, came to Swarthmore to deliver a talk on Citizens United, the landmark Supreme Court case that essentially allowed the creation of Super PACs by striking down sections of the McCain-Feingold Act. Burrus made the argument that Super PACs are not as detrimental to American democracy as one may think, citing Washington's mudslinging in the elections of the 1800s as evidence that politics has always been messy, and defending the view that with greater regulation of campaign finances, incumbents would have an even greater advantage in elections as challengers would have little to no name recognition and no financial means to compensate for this.

However, it is incumbents that have the most committed supporters, especially in the form of interest groups and corporations whose desires and needs these officials have continually defended. Super PACs are far more likely to be loyal to incumbents who have proven their worth and value, further disadvantaging challengers like Mr. Trump (unfortunately not disadvantaging him enough to drop out, sadly). While Trump, a billionaire, can afford not to worry about the benefits of incumbency and campaign spending as he could run a largely self-funded campaign, other candidates that are lesser known but more refreshing for the corrupt Washington D.C. environment may be easily discouraged from running. This lowers the quality and breadth of the legislative discourse that can be held at a national level, resulting in less impactful policy and a less representative democracy.

While Swatties can often be rather harsh towards Trump as a candidate, perhaps rightfully so, even candidates who may seem ludicrous can bring issues of great importance to light. Several of the students that attended Burrus' talk seemed to be equally wary of the influence of money in elections; perhaps Trump has found his sweet spot with college students across the country.

While Trump has not found a supporter in me as I highly doubt that he will be able to do anything to reform campaign finance if elected (I still shudder at this prospect), he raises a very valid point, and has set a good example for other candidates by requesting Super PACs to refrain from raising money to support his candidacy. It remains left to be seen whether any candidates will actually act on this, just as it remains left to be seen if these PACs will actually heed Trump's appeal or whether we will continue our descent into oligarchic corporate rule.