

Organization for Competitive Markets Briefing Paper

11/30/2016

Money Talks, but Its Language Is Vulgar

“Federal investigators have uncovered documents relating to joint funds maintained by the big packers ... to employ lobbyists and pay their unaudited expenses; to influence legislative bodies; to elect candidates who would wink at violations of law and defeat those pledged to fair enforcement; to control tax officials and thereby evade just taxation; to secure modifications of governmental rules and regulations by devious methods; to bias public opinion by attempting to influence editorial policy through advertising, loans, and subsidies, and by the publication and distribution at large expense of false and misleading statements.”

Sound familiar? This remarkable paragraph is from the 1918 FTC investigation of the meat packers. So, why does it sound familiar almost 100 years later? Well, the wheel of history turns slowly but surely, and the problem is back. Is it even more rampant now? And isn't it true that the problem of a century ago is now an affliction of concentrated industry, uncontrolled lobbying on elected officials, and no way, except reliance on honor, for ordinary people to expect their voices to be heard over the sounds of spending by huge vested interests?

We can see that meatpackers and their organizations are using age-old tactics to try to kill GIPSA's proposed [Packers and Stockyards Act rules](#), and they used them to end [Country of Origin Labeling \(COOL\)](#). They do so to maintain their stranglehold on dysfunctional markets, and to drive down what producers are paid and to drive up what consumers are required to pay them. They drive farmers and ranchers into serfdom. They distribute false and misleading statements. They influence legislative bodies through massive lobbying. They buy the elections of candidates who will wink at violations of the law.

This must stop. The nation is ours; it belongs to citizens, not mega-business interests. OCM calls on every American to monitor sources of funding and influence for their legislators to ensure we have a government “of the people” and not a government “of the corporation.” Abusers must be called out. And influence peddlers must be relegated to the same historical role as the snake oil salesman.

In the 2016 election cycle, PAC contributions by the agribusiness industry to members of the [House Agriculture Committee](#) total over \$6 million, with only \$1.7 million contributed by individuals. In the [Senate Agriculture Committee](#), another \$6 million was contributed by the agribusiness industry, compared to \$3.7 million contributed by individuals.

Agribusiness has spent [over \\$2 billion](#) on lobbying Congress since 1998. This represents a modest meal for every American, rich and poor alike, and all for the sake of driving up what consumers pay and down what producers get.

Would corporate agribusiness spend this kind of money if it were not getting more in return? Not likely. Whose interests is it representing? Has most of the \$2 billion been contributed to represent interests of transnational corporations, or interests of the American citizen?

Can you afford to sit by minding your own store while your town and country are being taken? If you can, where on Earth do you live?

Follow the money. Come to your own conclusion. Then, get out of your chair and help us fix it.

Right now!

Links of Interest

PAC and individual political contributions can be obtained at www.fec.gov.

Additional details of agribusiness contributions by year are available at <http://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/indus.php?id=A&year=2016> and <http://www.followthemoney.org/industry-influence>

PAC Contributions to Candidates by Agribusiness
<http://www.opensecrets.org/pacs/sector.php?cycle=2016&txt=A01>

2016 Contributions to Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee, 114th Congress
<http://www.opensecrets.org/cmteprofiles/overview.php?cmte=SAGR&cmteid=S02&cycle=2012&congn=114>

2016 Contributions to Members of the House Agriculture Committee, 114th Congress
<http://www.opensecrets.org/cmteprofiles/overview.php?cmte=HAGR&cmteid=H02&cycle=2012&congn=114>

2016 Contributions to Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, 114th Congress
<http://www.opensecrets.org/cmteprofiles/overview.php?cycle=2010&cmteid=S17&cmte=SJUD&congn=11>

2016 Contributions to Members of the House Judiciary Committee, 114th Congress
<http://www.opensecrets.org/cmteprofiles/overview.php?cmte=HJUD&cmteid=H13&cycle=2008&congn=114>