



# **Minnesota Citizens for Clean Elections**

Newsletter No. 3 – **Summer 2018**

**Welcome to the latest issue of the MnCCE newsletter!**

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## **Upcoming Events**

### **August**

No MnCCE monthly meeting in August.

**8/14: Remember to vote in your primary!!**

Voting is how American citizens exercise their power. Encourage everyone to get to the polls!

**8/16** - MnCCE Board of Directors will attend the Minn. Council of Non-Profits Essentials Conference

**8/23, 10:00 am** - MnCCE Board of Directors meeting Edina Library Conf. room, 5280 Grandview Square.

### **September**

**9/8, 10:00 am** – MnCCE monthly meeting, Edina Library meeting room - 5280 Grandview Square. Speaker: Anastacia Belladonna Carrera, Executive Director of Common Cause Minnesota on "Partisan Redistricting" (gerrymandering).

**9/7, Dark Money**, the movie at the Lagoon Theater - See local listings for times. For more info see: <https://www.darkmoneyfilm.com/>. "DARK MONEY, a political thriller, examines one of the greatest present threats to American democracy: the influence of untraceable corporate money on elections and elected officials and how American elections are bought and sold. The film exposes the real-life impacts of the US Supreme Court's Citizens United decision. This movie won the Sundance award.

**9/23:** "Best of the Wurst 2018" - Fair Vote MN fundraiser – Cider, beer and sausage! See link for more info: <http://www.bestofthewurst.org/>

## **Accomplishments**

Candidate survey completed. See details under the "MnCCE In Action" section on page 2.

MnCCE Chair George Beck spoke at the June 30, 2018 (belated) Tax Day Rally at the State Capitol. His remarks are reprinted on page 3.

Chair Beck also attended the Represent Us Money in Politics conference in Chicago on July 24, 2018. The conference focused on democracy vouchers.

## **Help Needed**

**Please help MnCCE fight for clean elections!**

## **Membership Team:**

The team keeps in contact with MnCCE members. We are looking to add another team member. We also need someone with experience in writing newsletters to organize/lay-out/format the MnCCE newsletter. Others will provide the content. If you are interested or want info, please Contact: Ron Bardal at: [rbardal@hotmail.com](mailto:rbardal@hotmail.com) or 651-633-9238.

## **Education Team:**

Lonni Skrentner recently accepted the Education Team leader position at MnCCE. She is also on the MnCCE Board of Directors. She is a former Government AP teacher at the Edina High School, chaired the Edina LVW, and has taught OLLI classes on campaign finance reform and redistricting.

Lonnie says the team may move slowly for now as they contemplate a variety of audiences and messages. All members should feel free to contact Lonni with suggestions and questions. You can reach her at: [lonni.skrentner@gmail.com](mailto:lonni.skrentner@gmail.com)

## **MnCCE In Action**

### **Three-Question Survey of Minn. Candidates**

In June, 18 MnCCE members worked diligently to survey about 400 candidates for state and national elections, to assess where they stand on three issues most important to our organization. This is a report on the survey results.

The three issues relate to campaign financing:

- a) Reversing *Citizens United*, which ended the ability of governments to set spending limits.
- b) Disclosure of the sources of money spent.
- c) Support for public financing, where more of that funding comes from identifiable taxpayers.

Over a third of the candidates responded, which is quite strong for a survey of politicians. This was due in no small part to the dedication and perseverance of our core volunteers who gave their time to try track down all candidates.

The response rate of those surveyed was: 15% of GOP candidates, 49% of DFL candidates and 18% of third party candidates.

The data show that a majority of democrats, republicans and third party candidates, who responded, support campaign finance reform. This is an improvement from what we have seen recently in the legislature where these ideals have been tabled or even attacked by the legislature's leadership.

But, we cannot conclude that a majority of all 400 candidates we sent surveys to, show strong support for the issues. In the hurried confusion of their campaigns, surely some candidates never got a questionnaire or were too busy to respond. The significant difference in response rate cannot be explained away with, "I did not receive it", or similar rationale. Safe to say our volunteers did not withhold the survey from some or give stronger follow-up to others.

Some may have thought, "I don't agree with these positions and I may even question the motive(s) of this organization (MnCCE). If I answer, I will be held accountable. I might be better off not responding." We will never know with certainty why many did not respond. However, we would be naïve to believe the non-responders are as supportive of our issues as the responders.

Is this a partisan issue? Yes and no. The party in power always attracts the most money and wants to stay in power. It is certainly not a partisan issue with the voters. A 2015 poll by the New York Times and CBS found that 80% of voters from

both parties feel strongly there is too much money in politics, and support reform.

The public is slowly coming to understand that the tsunami of money in campaigns, since the 2010 *Citizens United* decision, is corrupting our elected officials. The agenda in Washington, and to a lesser degree in St. Paul, is all about satisfying major contributors and corporate interests, and not the constituency.

But we still have a lot of work to do in spreading the word across the state that the people's agenda should be the center of politicians' attention, instead of being swayed by big money influence.

## **Education Corner**

### **Don't be surprised by what's on your ballot!**

Ever gone to your voting site and found items on the ballot that you didn't expect? Do you want to never experience that again? Here's how - Look up your ballot ahead of time. Go to: [https://ballotpedia.org/Minnesota\\_elections,\\_2018](https://ballotpedia.org/Minnesota_elections,_2018).

Enter your address and select "Go." Choose Primary or General election. Select "Continue." *Note that General election ballots will be ready only after the primaries are completed Aug. 14.*

Review the ballot, then get any information you need to be an informed voter. **Finally, get out and vote in your Aug. 14<sup>th</sup> primary election!**

Don't know where your polling place is? Go to: <https://www.sos.state.mn.us/elections-voting/election-day-voting>

Click on "Where do I vote? Enter your zip code. Click "Go". Enter your house no. and street. Click "Go". Voting place is under: "You vote at."

Contact your candidates to let them know how you feel about issues. Don't know their names? Go to: <https://www.gis.leg.mn/iMaps/districts/>. At the left center of the page, enter your address and

click on the magnifying glass. A list of who represents you will appear.

## 2018 Tax Day Rally Talk

A speech by George Beck, Chair,  
Minnesota Citizens for Clean Elections

I have a question today. My question is for the legislators who meet in our beautiful Capitol. My question is: “Whatever happened to “We the People?” Why do you fail to represent your constituents when it comes to money in politics?”

We know that over 80% of Americans including Minnesotans, Republicans and Democrats alike, believe that the Citizens United decision abolishing contribution limits should be reversed. As Steven Brill has said, The First Amendment has become a tool for the wealthy to put a thumb on the scales of democracy.

**And yet**, our legislators have failed to even send a resolution to Congress asking that this disaster for democracy be corrected. Nineteen other states have done so, but not Minnesota. **Do Minnesotans support unlimited money in political campaigns? No.**

Even the Citizens United court made it clear that **disclosure** of contributions in this electronic age is constitutional and, in fact, a **safeguard** against allowing billions of dollars into our campaigns. Knowing who supports candidates financially is critical in deciding who to vote for, and in knowing if office holders are voting for contributors over constituents.

75% of Americans support disclosing the identity of donors. Legislators, **why** haven't you required disclosure of dark money from phony quote “social welfare” non-profits that flood Minnesota with anonymous money in our elections? **Do Minnesotans support secret contributions? No.**

In Minnesota, independent committees can make electioneering communications, like TV ads, social media and mailings, without disclosing who paid for it, simply by careful wording of the content. Other states and the federal government prohibit this. We need to know if our legislators are representing their political party or their contributors instead of us. That is **not** a representative democracy. That is not government of the people, by the people and for the people. **Is that how we want our government to function?** Of course not!

84% of Americans believe that living in a democracy is important. But, 68% believe that our democracy is getting weaker and 50% believe that our country is in real danger of becoming **nondemocratic and authoritarian**. The Economist magazine recently downgraded the United States from a full democracy to a “flawed democracy.”

We need to reclaim our government from wealthy contributors who engage in what is currently, **legal corruption**, by buying the votes of our representatives. The so called, “Pay to Play”. We are onto you. **Will we allow this to continue and our democracy to be weakened? No.**

**We the people are still in charge if we make our voices heard.** We need to vote this fall for change and we need to make sure that the 2019 legislature addresses money in politics to end the abuses that are destroying our democracy.

## **Editorial section**

### **The Threat of “Tribalism.”**

Columnist David Brooks spoke at Davidson College about why America seems to be splintering apart. He blames this on what he calls “Tribalism.”

Historically, we are familiar with geographic tribes. This is different - it's cultural tribalism and exists when groups (“tribes) of people shut out opinions of other “tribes” and refuse to budge from their stance to even discuss a different viewpoint.

What can we do to change a selfish, culturally tribal society? Brooks has an idea pertinent to MnCCE: *Form groups that stand for something, and help others thrive in an amoral and individualistic society focused only on what's good for me and my “tribe” at the expense of the rest of society.*

We are a group that stands for something. We exist to educate and lead the way to achieve a cohesive society that cares for our fellow citizen's well-being.

I encourage you to listen to Brooks' talk, especially from minute 15 through minute 58: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URSERvgLDGY>.

Also worth checking out - “Open Secrets” on Dark money (see topics listed in the left margin):

[https://www.opensecrets.org/outsidespending/nonprof\\_summ.php](https://www.opensecrets.org/outsidespending/nonprof_summ.php)

Your editor, Ron Bardal

### **Letters to the Editor:**

Letters to the editor are welcome (reserving the right to edit for sake of space, if necessary).

Send letters to [rbardal@hotmail.com](mailto:rbardal@hotmail.com).