

Is trouble brewing for Republican Leadership on Campaign Finance Reform?

[HR 1](#), or the “For the People Act”, passed in the House on March 8th, 2019. But this sweeping anti-corruption bill, which among other things includes campaign finance reform, may be DOA. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has said he won’t let this bill be brought up for consideration on the Senate floor, effectively killing it. Given how the [GOP views](#) campaign finance reform, (they don’t like it, they don’t like disclosure requirements, or contribution limits, or measures that limit the amount of money corporations can spend in elections) this is no surprise.

In recent political history, and definitely since the Supreme Court’s 2010 decision in *Citizens United*, the Republican party has been starkly anti-campaign finance reform; they believe trying to limit spending by individuals and corporations in elections is a violation of freedom of speech. Despite this, national polling done by [Pew Research Center](#) shows that more than 75% of people in the US would support limits on campaign spending. That includes 72% of Republicans.

So, if more than 2/3 of their constituency favor some degree of campaign finance why are Republicans in Congress so against reform? Why is there this rift between GOP leaders and the GOP voters? Does this rift matter? Interestingly, some of these answers may be found 930 miles away.

Missouri, November 8th, 2016, election night. Missourians overwhelmingly voted ([70-30](#)) to approve [Amendment 2](#), and establish campaign contribution limits, while simultaneously voting in a [wave of Republicans](#), the party who opposes campaign finance reform. There are several reasons these two seemingly conflicting events happened on the same night. One of them is Amendment 2 and campaign finance weren’t major issues during the campaign. Of the four major party candidates running for Missouri Governor and Senator, only Democratic gubernatorial candidate Chris Koster explicitly mentioned campaign finance on his campaign website. Democratic Senate candidate Jason Kander only made vague reference to it while neither Republican candidate had any mention of it.

Coverage of Amendment 2 and campaign finance reform in Missouri’s leading newspaper, *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, was also relatively low. Of the 1,433 articles in the paper about the election in the year leading up to it, only 62 articles (4.3%) mentioned campaign finance reform or contribution limits. Only 12 articles even talked about Amendment 2. When it was addressed, most of the articles were informational, about what the amendment did, or editorials encouraging Missourians to [“Take back Missouri government by approving Amendment 2”](#).

Lack of coverage, lack of opposition, lack of debate about campaign finance reform among statewide candidates, plus the fact that before this amendment passed, [Missouri was one of only 12 states](#) that had no campaign finance laws (meaning one [St. Louis billionaire](#) was the biggest individual donor of political cash, spending nearly \$45 million in elections since 2008) it begins to make sense why so many in Missouri supported this amendment.

But that still doesn't answer why they simultaneously voted a wave of Republicans into office when the GOP platform clearly does not represent what Missourians want in terms of campaign finance reform.

In Missouri and nationally about 70% of people, Democrats, independents, and Republicans, support laws limiting money in elections. But sparse coverage in Missouri newspapers and [national polling](#) indicates that almost no one believes that money in elections is a major problem facing the nation. People care much more about the economy, health care, and education than they do about campaign finance reform. Missourians are still voting for Republicans because they like the GOP's platform on those issues that are more important to them.

Does it matter that Republicans seem to be out of touch with what the general public wants in the area of campaign finance? Maybe right now it doesn't. Since campaign finance isn't the most important issue to people, they will still vote for Republicans despite disagreement on that issue. But what happened in Missouri in the 2016 election shows that campaign finance reform has legs in the states. If it can get on a state ballot, it has the potential to pass. This undermines the Republican Party. So, it may not matter right now, but it could in the future. The Republican leadership are going to have to watch this issue. If more states do what Missouri did, continually fighting against campaign finance reform may cause them to appear out of touch with the voters, causing problems.