



The Big Sky Country

MONTANA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

REPRESENTATIVE ROB COOK
HOUSE DISTRICT 18

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To Members of the Political Subdivisions Committee;

Montana has had a long and sordid relationship with dark money. Each time my state has been faced with its intrusion into the political sphere - either the citizenry, or the legislature, has reacted to clean up in its aftermath.

Montana's political ills began when Copper King William Clark bribed the Montana State Legislature to purchase a US Senate seat. Other members of the US Senate, after being made aware of his underhanded activities, refused to allow him to be seated. William Clark's perfidy has been largely credited with being the driving force behind the 17th amendment to our US Constitution. The amendment that removed the selection of Senators from the purview of state legislatures and, instead, made their selection subject to each state's popular vote. In a similar fashion, Montanans employed our initiative process to amend our constitution. The amendment banished corporate money from our state's elections.

For nearly 100 years Montana's amended constitution served my state well. It protected our elections from 1912 until 2010 when the *Citizens United* decision declared our ban on corporate money to be unconstitutional. Seemingly overnight, hundreds of political action committees sprang into existence. Most of them providing no visible clues as to the true source of their bloated war chests.

Groups with disingenuous names and suspect enrollment began to campaign against incumbent legislators in our state's primary elections. One of these groups, Mothers against Child Predators, was comprised in its entirety of just two men and it did not receive an in-state donation.

Political action committees like these plagued both parties and, sometimes, they even artificially propped up a Libertarian or Green party candidate to syphon votes away from Republicans and Democrats in the general election. Vote syphoning by artificially supported Libertarian candidates likely cost Republican Representative Denny Rehberg a US Senate seat and it certainly caused Republican candidate for governor, Rick Hill, to lose to Democrat Steve Bullock.

After a failed attempt in 2013 to revise our state's campaign finance reporting laws, the legislature returned in 2015 to successfully pass some of the nation's most stringent reporting requirements. By revealing who is spending in our local elections, these reporting requirements provide the transparency necessary for the citizens of Montana to make an informed choice while voting.

As a nation we are currently suffering from a dangerous lack of trust in the institutions of democracy. Nowhere is this more apparent than in our widespread disbelief in the integrity of our elections.

Transparent campaign finance reporting is just one tool we can employ on our long road back to trust in our institutions. I urge this committee to embrace the merits of transparent campaign finance reporting by passing HB1451 – The Voters Right to Know Act.

Thanks you all for your time and consideration,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rob Cook". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Former Representative Rob Cook – Montana HD18

P.S. When the 2015 legislation first passed, there were many who felt it would create a disadvantage for Republicans. This is not true – as evidenced by Montana’s statewide red wave election in 2020. Transparent campaign finance reporting is not partisan. Rather, transparency is necessary to ensure that our citizens make their best choices when casting their ballot on Election Day.