



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on October 12, 2010

Obama and the Left Assault Anonymous Political Speech

The word has been handed down, from MSNBC's Rachel Maddow all the way up to President Barack Obama, and the talking points have come out. Political speech that isn't reported to the federal government is a "threat to our democracy," in the words of President Obama. The Democratic National Committee has released a television ad accusing the U.S. Chamber of Commerce of diverting foreign members' dues toward political ads in the United States.



Yet the history of the American Republic reveals that the Founding Fathers not only supported anonymous political writing and speech by enacting the First Amendment, they regularly engaged in anonymous political speech themselves. Anonymous political speech is as American as the anonymously written [Federalist Papers](#). Or, for that matter, the *Anti-Federalist Papers*, some of which were written by Patrick Henry and Richard Henry Lee.

Political "progressives" are engaging in a coordinated attack against this constitutionally protected form of free speech. MSNBC commentator Rachel Maddow, interviewing the candidates for Oregon's 4th Congressional District, noted that a mysterious group, Concerned Taxpayers of America, had funded \$150,000 in television commercials supporting the Republican challenger in the race, Dr. Art Robinson. In advance of interviewing the incumbent Democrat Pete DeFazio, Maddow [opined](#) that anonymous television advertisements that express political opinions were:

Money-laundering on a grand scale. Money-laundering, that's what it is, to take over the Congress of the United States of America. There is no ceiling on what you can spend. This is the way the elections are running right now. After the *Citizens United*, after the campaign finance changes that conservatives are supporting this year, this is the way our elections run in America now. And this, this is the context in which every individual American citizen of average, mediate, moderate or extreme means every American in the country is deciding whether or not it's a good idea to donate 25 bucks to their chosen candidate to try to make a human-sized difference in this year's elections. What do you think your odds are of making a difference, a human-sized difference, as a regular human, a regular citizen if this is the landscape in which our elections get decided now? ...You don't stand a chance.

Of course, this is not the way elections are being held right now. Elections are simply ballots and counting. What Maddow was describing is political speech, the kind of speech the First Amendment was specifically written to protect. The First Amendment [reads](#), "Congress shall make no law ... abridging



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the freedom of speech or of the press.” Maddow assumes that the American people are mindless morons who will do the bidding of whatever anonymous voices on the television tell them, and that an individual with a powerful message can never obtain a large audience through the Internet. The reality is that the anonymous spending remains a tiny proportion of total campaign spending. Maddow [told](#) the Republican Art Robinson, “It would be illegal for somebody to give you a \$150,000 donation,” but Robinson replied of the Concerned Taxpayers of America television advertisements that “I’m delighted that these people have helped to level the playing field.”

Of course, the playing field is not leveled. Thompson has to contest with Political Action Committees that have lined the pockets of his opponent, Pete DeFazio, by far more than the \$150,000 Concerned Taxpayers of America have spent. Moreover, he has to contend with big media, like MSNBC’s Maddow, who are openly sympathetic with DeFazio. And the biggest of all money influences in the political campaign is also working against Robinson: federal handouts. Federal transfer payments to farmers, the poor, retired, union highway workers, state workers, local school officials, all are geared toward the age-old election strategy of “tax, spend, and elect” first perfected during Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “New Deal.”

Non-plussed, Maddow [pressed](#): “Does the fact that the donations to this group are anonymous, does that bother you at all, just as an American? I mean, if you get elected in part, because this spending and then you find out it’s from criminals or foreign interests or communists or something, wouldn’t that bother you?”

This, of course, may explain in part why Concerned Taxpayers of America chose to remain anonymous. They probably wanted to avoid being smeared by Rachel Maddow as foreign communist criminals. If so, you can count that effort as an epic fail. The only wonder in Maddow’s statement is why she left out that they could also be “baby-killers” and “wife-beaters.” Indeed, it is possible they could be those as well. After all, the anonymous donors are backing a Republican, which in Maddow’s worldview is a rough moral equivalent.

Robinson calmly [replied](#), “Your representation that this money could come from criminals is simply a way of trying to smear them and smear me by association.” Of course, Robinson didn’t even have an association with the group. He doesn’t even know who they are, and because of what’s left of the campaign finance laws after the *Citizens United* decision, he can’t know. The law still prohibits Robinson from coordinating with like-minded outside groups. “I haven’t been trying to find out, because I think that’s the legal position I’m supposed to take,” Robinson [told](#) National Public Radio.

Days after the Maddow clash with Robinson, President Obama had apparently received his marching orders. He [told](#) the audience at a Philadelphia rally:

Thanks to a Supreme Court decision called *Citizens United*, they are being helped along this year by special interest groups that are spending unlimited amounts of money on attack ads — attacking folks like Patrick Murphy, attacking folks like Joe Sestak — just attacking people without ever disclosing who’s behind all these attack ads. You don’t know. It could be the oil industry. It could be the insurance industry. It could even be foreign-owned corporations. You don’t know because they don’t have to disclose. Now, that’s not just a threat to Democrats — that’s a threat to our democracy. Every American business and industry deserves a seat at the table, but they don’t get to a chance to buy every chair.

Of course, anonymous political speech is not a threat to our system of government. To the contrary, our political system is a direct by-product of anonymous political speech. Samuel Adams wrote anonymously



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almost constantly, and his [anonymous writings as “Vindex,”](#) among the contributions of other patriotic anonymous writers, were a prime cause of the American Revolution. America is an independent nation in large part due to anonymous political speech. Moreover, America’s current Constitution would likely never have been adopted had it not been for James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay writing the anonymous *Federalist Papers* urging the states to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

Photo: Art Robinson



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