



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on May 17, 2012

Sen. John McCain Huddles With Dems Over Campaign Finance Reform

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) is huddling with Senate Democrats to launch a joint effort to force outside organizations that have invested millions of dollars in the 2012 elections to report detailed information about their donors. Although he's kept quiet on the matter in recent years, McCain was once heralded as Congress's leading chieftain of campaign finance reform, and he is now seeking to revive his reputation for curbing the influence of money in political elections.



Former and current government officials who worked with McCain in the 1990s and early 2000s had begun to surmise that he'd surrendered the issue. But the Arizona Senator professed on Tuesday that he planned to reignite the discussion over campaign finance reform by forming a bipartisan coalition, despite the inevitable opposition from his Republican colleagues, who largely opposed his efforts a decade ago.

Mr. McCain pledged he would keep the legislation fair and balanced, as to regulate both labor union activity and campaign spending by corporations and wealthy individuals. "I've been having discussions with Sen. [Sheldon] Whitehouse (D-R.I.) and a couple others on the issue," he [told](#) *The Hill*. "I want it to be balanced and address the issue of union contributions as well as other outside contributions."

The [Democracy Is Strengthened by Casting Light On Spending in Elections \(DISCLOSE\) Act](#), which was introduced in the House on April 29, 2010 and in the Senate on July 21, 2010, is the original form of the legislation. The original bill stated the following:

To amend the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 to prohibit foreign [influence](#) in Federal elections, to prohibit government contractors from making expenditures with respect to such elections, and to establish additional disclosure requirements with respect to spending in such elections, and for other purposes.

The Democrats' revised edition of the DISCLOSE Act, which was unveiled in March by Sen. Whitehouse, would obligate any group spending \$10,000 or more on campaign ads or other campaigning activity to provide the Federal Election Commission with a disclosure report within 24 hours. The reports would describe the nature of expenditures exceeding \$1,000 and note the names of all donors contributing \$10,000 or more.

The Supreme Court's landmark 2010 ruling, *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, largely prompted the legislation, as the court's decision held that restricting political expenditures by unions and corporations directly violates the [First Amendment](#) to the U.S. Constitution. However, McCain believes the windfall of new union and corporate money in the electioneering process, which led to the development of the super PAC, will open the door to "a major scandal."

Mr. Whitehouse has expressed much enthusiasm about the prospect of working with McCain. "He has a



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really remarkable record of courage and dedication in this area, so it's a question of working to make sure the technical issues he wants to address and the technical issues that we want to address make a match and we can find something to agree on," the Rhode Island Senator affirmed. "We are beginning those discussions, but they've come to no conclusion yet, other than they are going forward amicably."

Obama was a staunch supporter of the DISCLOSE Act back in 2010, and he decried the Supreme Court's ruling in *Citizens United*. He hailed support for the original House version of the bill, asserting on April 29, 2010, the day the legislation was introduced:

I welcome the introduction of this strong bi-partisan legislation to control the flood of special interest money into America's elections. Powerful special interests and their lobbyists should not be able to drown out the voices of the American people. Yet they work ceaselessly toward that goal: they claim the protection of the Constitution in extending this power, and they exploit every loophole in the law to escape limits on their activities.

The legislation introduced today would establish the toughest-ever disclosure requirements for election-related spending by big oil corporations, Wall Street and other special interests, so the American people can follow the money and see clearly which special interests are funding political campaign activity and trying to buy representation in our government... I hope that Congress will give this legislation the swift consideration it deserves, which is especially urgent now in the aftermath of the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision.

Super PACs and other political advocacy groups have doled out tens of millions of dollars to influence the Senate GOP primaries, while Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney has raised millions of dollars through his own donor groups. But the President also has indulged in the big-money campaigning measures that stream through large political advocacy groups.

Back in February, Obama [emboldened major fundraisers](#) to support the super PAC called Priorities USA. The Obama campaign's decision to promote Priorities USA, among other large donor groups, arrived soon after fundraising reports revealed that American Crossroads and Crossroads GPS — two GOP super PACs associated with Republican strategist Karl Rove — raised a sizable \$51 million last year while Democratic groups collected only \$19 million.

Due to such financial pressure, the President folded on his purported belief that large fundraising groups only taint the election process. At the time, Obama campaign manager Jim Messina addressed supporters in an email [noting](#) that the campaign "can't allow for two sets of rules" in which the President's Republican presidential rival benefits from "unlimited spending and Democrats unilaterally disarm." Further, he added, "We decided to do this because we can't afford for the work you're doing in your communities, and the grassroots donations you give to support it, to be destroyed by hundreds of millions of dollars in negative ads."

In effect, the President swiftly abandoned his former stance on the issue as soon as his Republican counterparts launched their own big-dollar fundraising schemes. As for many Democrats in Congress, some critics contend that support for campaign finance reform has been prompted by the fact that their fundraising dollars have paled in comparison to their Republican counterparts.

Whitehouse's legislation has garnered 43 Democratic co-sponsors, but other than McCain, not a single Republican has showed any interest in pursuing such reform. And even if the DISCLOSE Act was to pass the Senate, it would have an unlikely go at squeezing through the GOP-controlled House.



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Photo: Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., middle, speaks with Senators Joseph Lieberman, (I-Conn.) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) during a press conference at the U.S. embassy, Jan. 17, 2012 in

Manila, Philippines: AP Images



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