

Dark Money Casts An Ugly Shadow On Freedom Of Speech. Proposition 211 Will Give Us Some Much-Needed Sunshine

By Former Tempe Mayor Hugh Hallman

Just as free speech doesn't permit defamation, political speech should require transparency.

I have faith in the political process, but that faith was shaken when I found myself in the crosshairs of "dark money" attack ads.

I served as Mayor of Tempe from 2004 to 2012. Before that, I served on the Tempe City Council. The politics were tough but fair. That changed when I ran for Arizona Treasurer in 2014. My past of crusading for utility ratepayers and the merits of solar energy motivated a vicious dark money campaign against me.

The attacks were personal, false, and anonymous. It's easy to hurl insults when you can do so hiding behind a dark money group. It's the coward's way and it belittles our great state whenever these cowards succeed. In my case they did.

Years later we would learn that Arizona Public Service's parent company was writing some big checks from the shadows. I wasn't the only target. Other targets included candidates for the Arizona Corporation Commission, the state agency that regulates utilities such as APS.

Learning the truth was important. But for me and the other targets of this dark money spending, the damage was already done. And while I have no plans to re-enter politics, I do want to help restore honor to the political system in Arizona.

That's why I support Proposition 211, The Voters Right to Know Act, which would rein in dark money by requiring most groups that spend \$50,000 or more on statewide campaigns or \$25,000 or more on local campaigns to disclose the original contributors who provided the money for their political advertising. It doesn't prevent free speech. Have at it. Just take responsibility for what is being said.

As a Libertarian leaning Republican, I feel strongly about the right to free speech as well as the public's right to know. Proposition 211 upholds both.

You have a right to know who is writing the checks when it comes to influencing your vote. Unfortunately, more and more political spending these days hides in the

shadows of dark money, allowing political operatives to hide their donors and their motives.

Dark money violates some of the most important guiding principles of elections: honesty and transparency. Political attack ads, love them or hate them, are as old as politics itself. But when the identities of the people paying for the ads are hidden, voters are deceived, motives are concealed, and elections are tainted.

Whether you are Libertarian, Republican, Democrat or Independent, we can all agree that transparency in political spending elevates our elections and better informs voters.

When I served as Mayor of Tempe, I frequently crossed political aisles to achieve the best outcomes for the people I served. Prop 211 does the same. According to recent polls, it enjoys massive support from conservatives, liberals, and those across the political spectrum. That says a lot about the wisdom of this measure and the wisdom of the vast majority of Arizonans who support its passage. But let's not take those poll numbers for granted. Let's finish the job. Let's seal the deal. Please vote YES on Proposition 211.

