

BACKGROUND IN RESPONSE TO THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The *Wall Street Journal* article purports to show that union spending on politics is far greater than known and is as big a factor as excessive corporate money in politics, but in using Department of Labor LM-2 forms, it twists union spending data in key ways:

- The Department of Labor numbers define all advocacy for state and federal issues as “political” work – everything from someone writing policy proposals to create jobs to working in a local community to elect a working family friendly City Council. (By this definition, the entire budget of the Chamber of Commerce would be considered political, but the Chamber doesn’t report its spending on DOL LM forms.)
- The *Journal* misses the central point that unions are advocacy organizations. The job of a union is to advocate on behalf of working men and women.
- They ignore that corporations outspend unions by well more than 10 to 1 but are free to hide their spending while unions disclose everything.
<http://www.opensecrets.org/overview/blio.php> and
<http://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/top.php?indexType=c>

SPECIFIC PUSH BACK POINTS

- They Say: “Organized labor spends about four times as much on politics and lobbying as generally thought[. . .] Previous estimates have focused on labor unions' filings with federal election officials, which chronicle contributions made directly to federal candidates and union spending in support of candidates for Congress and the White House”
 - By labeling all union legislative and issue advocacy into “political” in the same sense as partisan candidate elections, the Wall Street Journal misuses a routine government report (the “Form LM2”) not designed for the purposes to which they deploy it. Conflating issue advocacy on behalf of working people with electoral politics means treating as “election-related” everything from expert input into the formulation of mine safety rules to assisting the civil rights community, be it the 1963 March on Washington or voting protection efforts year-round.
 - And so yes—union spending on political activities and lobbying,” as defined broadly by the Department of Labor to include everything from civil rights to municipal elections, is greater than direct support for federal politicians. This is old news; unions have filed publicly available Form LM-2 *for over half a century*. Newsworthy? Not at all.
 - They even quote an expert who explains that (a) none of this is news and (b) unions are only as strong as their members grassroots’ energy: “We have always known that much of [unions'] influence comes from their political mobilization, but we have never been able to put a number on it,” said

Bob Biersack, a longtime FEC official who is now with the Center for Responsive Politics. "They are a human force in the political process, but a lot of that falls outside the kind of spending that needs to be disclosed to the FEC."

- The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) treats as a scoop the fact that working people's political participation is not limited to federal elections. But it has long been known that unions also get involved in local and state elections as well as issue advocacy at a local, state and national basis.
- **DOUBLE COUNTING:** Whether it's by local affiliates or national coalitions or the AFL-CIO and affiliates, coordinated activity of, by and for working people often includes re-circulating financial resources between organizations so that it can be used most efficiently. Being honest and transparent in filling out a form not designed to answer the question that the Wall Street Journal asked, multiple labor organizations will report having spent the very same dollar. Because the LM2 form is not designed to enable disentangling that money, we cannot know precisely how much double or triple counting is embedded within the WSJ's summation, but we know it is considerable.
- They Say: "The result is that labor could be a stronger counterweight than commonly realized to "super PACs" that today raise millions from wealthy donors, in many cases to support Republican candidates and causes."
 - The article in no way supports the conclusion that unions have financial resources that are commensurate with what wealthy individuals and corporations are deploying in this or any election. Anyone tracking TV ad spending will note that there has been no increase in union advertising. *Citizens United* did enable unions to talk more broadly to more people via grassroots activity, but that does not increase the funds available to the labor movement to do so, as shown in the June Wisconsin gubernatorial recall where the labor-backed candidate was outspent enormously.
 - Regardless, there is no particular reason to compare union political and issue advocacy activity at the local, state and national level to federal Super PACs. Unions and Super PACs are merely two sectors of a far larger political/advocacy spending world that includes business corporations, c(4)s, c(6)s, regular PACs and rich individuals.
- The WSJ piece does concede that unions, uniquely among organizations politically active or not, disclose their finances fully. "Comparisons with corporate political spending aren't easy to make. Some corporate political spending, such as donations to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's political wing, doesn't need to be disclosed. What does have to be disclosed can't be found in a single database or two, as is the case with unions." What

would figures show about political and legislative involvement and public advocacy if business corporation, social welfare groups and trade associations had to disclose and categorize *all of their spending*, as unions do?

- The piece offers as fact a rightwing caricature of how unions endorse candidates: “The proportion of members who vote as the leadership prefers;” “unions' drives to persuade members to vote as the leadership dictates.”
 - Union political committees are created by an internally democratic proceeding and make endorsements in line with union membership’s preferences. These processes are in sharp contrast with corporate executives who don’t even reveal to their shareholders to whom and how much they are contributing politically.
- They Say: “The remainder represents portions of the salaries of union officials and employees attributable to political and lobbying activities. In 2010, politics and lobbying accounted for at least 50% of the hours worked by 1,996 union employees; 940 employees spent all of their time on politics, the unions reported. The reported hours worked in 2010 were equivalent to 3,242 full-time operatives with a payroll of \$214 million, according to the Journal's analysis.”
 - Again, the WSJ is combining experts on workplace safety and people lobbying for civil rights legislation with political operatives and treating the former no differently than the latter.
- They Say: “Unlike super PACs, which cannot directly support campaigns”
 - This statement is untrue—Super PACs can directly support campaigns, even though they cannot contribute to them. But they can and are designed and marketed to donors as a means to elect, eg, Mitt Romney (Restore Our Future).