

COMMISSIONER OF POLITICAL PRACTICES



STATE OF MONTANA

DENNIS UNSWORTH
COMMISSIONER
TELEPHONE (406) 444-2942
FAX (406) 444-1643

1205 EIGHTH AVENUE
PO BOX 202401
HELENA, MONTANA 59620-2401
www.politicalpractices.mt.gov

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At its core, this office provides the same function that's provided by similar offices in each of the 50 states – disclosure. Put simply, voters have a right to know who's trying to influence their vote, and where the money's coming from.

In *Citizens United* (130 S. Ct. 2010) the US Supreme Court reaffirmed by an 8-1 margin the importance of public disclosure of campaign finance in a democracy. Writing for the majority, Justice Kennedy reasoned:

With the advent of the Internet, prompt disclosure of expenditures can provide shareholders and citizens with the information needed to hold . . . elected officials accountable for their positions. . . (c)itizens can see whether elected officials are “‘in the pocket’ of so-called moneyed interests.” The First Amendment protects political speech; and disclosure permits citizens and shareholders to react to the speech. . . in a proper way. This transparency enables the electorate to make informed decisions and give proper weight to different speakers and messages.

With such a straight-forward endorsement, you're in good company if it irks you to see moneyed interests with unknown backers [step up their legal attacks](#) on these simple requirements. What seems to be a growing, if unfortunate part of the effort in this office is directed toward [scofflaws](#) and their like. It occurs at a time when our resources are spread very thin, so it wasn't a particularly good year for resolution of [formal complaints](#).

In the internet age, attention also needs to focus on modern information systems, including on-line reporting systems, something that's also drawn a great deal of time and effort, but in important ways we've been unable to achieve. While I'd like to give a cheerier report, I believe a necessary first step is to [tell like it is](#).

With a new legislature convening and a new commissioner stepping in, change is in the air. Disclosure and disclosure systems work to advance the vital role information plays in a democracy. Your voice in support is needed today as much as it's ever been.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dennis Unsworth".

Dennis Unsworth
Commissioner