



CLEAN
VIRGINIA

RESPONSES TO FREQUENTLY-HEARD EXCUSES FOR TAKING REGULATED UTILITY MONEY

NOVEMBER 2018

HERE ARE SOME COMMON PHRASES WE HEAR--AND SOME HELPFUL REBUTTALS

“Taking Dominion’s money doesn’t sway my vote.”

- The proper standard for ethical conduct is the appearance of a conflict of interest. And right now, it looks like legislators take Dominion and APCO money in exchange for introducing and helping pass their legislation.
- While lawmakers may deny it, there is an **overwhelming amount of evidence** that campaign contributions do influence lawmakers’ votes:
 - Legislators are highly responsive to the economic elite and interest groups representing businesses in setting policy agenda and voting, whereas **“the preferences of the average American appear to have only a minuscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy.”**¹
 - An analysis of Congressional votes on financial and telecommunication policies found that **“substantial numbers of legislators sell out the public interest in exchange for political money”** - in the case of the Markey amendment on net neutrality, every additional \$1,000 from firms in favor of the amendment decreased the lawmaker’s odds of voting against it by 24%.²
 - Corporations and business PACs **“use donations to acquire immediate access and favor--suggesting that they at least anticipate that the donations will influence policy.”**³
 - Senior policy makers are **three to four times more likely** to schedule a meeting with a political donor than a constituent.⁴
 - Firms that invest in relationships with tax policymakers via campaign finance contributions have **lower tax rates** than those that don’t.⁵

“I take everyone’s money.”

- For politicians not to reciprocate campaign contributions requires them to go their own psychology. “Taking everyone’s money” might make for a good, hard-nosed talking point, but it’s really just a tactic to cognitively disassociate from the money’s corrupting influence.
- If pressed, most politicians will concede that they do already draw lines on from whom they take money, such as Democrats refusing money from the NRA or Republicans from Planned Parenthood.

“I don’t want to unilaterally disarm.”

- Thanks to groups like Clean Virginia, legislators no longer have to “unilaterally disarm” - because of this clean source of campaign funding, candidates can refuse utility money and still legislate as they normally would.

“I have a good relationship with Dominion, and they don’t pressure me to vote one way or another.”

- Dominion doesn’t need pressure. They set the agenda by getting senior lawmakers to introduce bills that Dominion lobbyists have written. That’s the point of all the money and lobbying, so that it seems just like routine business.
- As a public service utility whose actions impact constituents across the Commonwealth, Dominion should not have to rely on contributions to maintain access.

“Dominion does great things in my community and employs my constituents.”

- These “great things” are paid for with ratepayer dollars. And because consumers can’t choose their energy provider, they are the ones bearing the cost of these “great things” at unnecessarily high prices.

“I’m in favor of campaign finance reform, but...”

- Clean Virginia allows lawmakers not to have to choose between idealism and the realities of campaign finance. And we will work with legislators to ensure real campaign finance reform is passed in Virginia.

“If I don’t take money from Dominion, what about the banks, the insurance companies, and the rest?”

- The key difference is that Virginians can choose their banks and their insurance companies. They can vote with their wallets. How do you “vote” against Dominion if you’re a regular Virginian?
- 25 states already ban their utilities from making campaign contributions.

“I need to maintain a good relationship with Dominion in case there are power outages or other problems.”

- This just proves our point that Dominion’s money does influence legislators. Making sure your utility is responsive to your constituents should have nothing to do with money or owed favors.

- ¹**“Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens”** by M. Gilens and B. Page. September 2014.
- ²**“Fifty Shades of Green: High Finance, Political Money, and the U.S. Congress”** by T. Ferguson, P. Jorgensen, and J. Chen. May 2017
- ³**“Money in Exile: Campaign Contributions and Committee Access”** by E. Powell and J. Grimmer. March 7 2016
- ⁴**“Campaign Contributions Facilitate Access to Congressional Officials: A Randomized Field Experiment”** by J. Kala and D. Broockman. April 2 2015
- ⁵**“The Benefits of a Relational Approach to Corporate Political Activity: Evidence from Political Contributions to Tax Policymakers”** by J. Brown, K. Drake, and L. Wellman. Spring 2015.