



To: **Supporters of Nonprofit Journalism**

From: David Moore, co-founder, Sludge

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This year, Sludge continued our [Democracy](#) series, covering solutions at the state and local levels to the challenges posed by Big Money and highlighting the work of community groups and reformers in creating a more responsive democracy.

The Democracy series works to interview campaigners and local activists, showcase their local organizing, and report out what's working in their communities to restore trust and encourage voting and local engagement. We keep up a steady beat of coverage on successes and raise solutions in the public eye as they consider Big Money influence.

One highlight this year was our **locally-informed stories** on public campaign financing programs, efforts in two cities that were overwhelmingly approved by voters. Though our republishing agreements with The American Prospect and Truthout, these stories reached hundreds of thousands of newsreaders, seeing news about local momentum:



DEMOCRACY

Oakland Community Groups Launch Campaign to Fight Big Money in Elections

The Fair Elections Oakland coalition has launched an effort to pass a public campaign financing program—called "Democracy Dollars"—like the vouchers used in Seattle elections since 2017.



DEMOCRACY

Oakland Voters to Decide on Fair Elections Measure

A ballot measure would create a public campaign financing option in Oakland, called "Democracy Dollars," and increase transparency of who is spending to influence city elections.



DEMOCRACY

Maine's Biggest City to Vote on Clean Elections Measure

The measure in Portland would institute a public campaign financing option similar to one already in place in the state, as well as prohibit corporate contributions and spending by foreign-controlled groups.

- Oakland Community Groups Launch Campaign to Fight Big Money in Elections ([link](#))
- Oakland Voters to Decide on Fair Elections Measure ([link](#))
- Maine's Biggest City to Vote on Clean Elections Measure ([link](#))

The stories were featured in the press galleries of the supporting coalitions in the [Bay Area](#) and in [Maine](#). The Oakland stories were shared on Twitter by Oakland Rising, Bay Rising, the Asian Law Caucus, and other state-based reformers like Common Cause, the League of Women Voters, and grassroots groups.

On Sludge's site, [Democracy](#) stories were read by tens of thousands of visitors, and were emailed to our newsletter list of more than 125,000 recipients.

This year, the top two most-visited stories in the series broke news on the issues of corporate accountability around voting access and dark money protections:



DEMOCRACY

Delta Donates to Sponsors of Georgia Voting Bill After Calling it 'Unacceptable'

New disclosures reveal the company's PAC donations do not align with its public statements.



DEMOCRACY

Florida Republican Introduces ALEC Bill to Protect Dark Money in Politics

The bill would make it a crime for regulators to reveal the donors behind dark money groups trying to influence the state's elections.

- Delta Donates to Sponsors of GA Voting Bill After Calling it Unacceptable ([link](#))
- Florida Republican Introduces ALEC Bill to Protect Dark Money in Politics ([link](#))

Sludge's republishing partners picked up our democracy stories for larger audiences of **hundreds of thousands of readers.**

* The American Prospect picked up our unique story on Seattle democracy voucher [successes](#) in diversifying the donor pool by age, race, and income, after a new study.

* TAP also brought over our stories on corporate donors to the Republican Attorneys General Association ([RAGA](#)), self-funding wealthy politicians being [helped](#) by the U.S. Supreme Court, and [major companies](#) donating to state politicians behind voting restrictions.

* The Portland, Maine campaign story, which put the initiative in the context of the popular state program, was picked up by our widely-read re-publishing partner [Truthout](#).



DEMOCRACY

Seattle Residents Make Record Use of 'Democracy Voucher' Program

Last year's elections saw gains in use of the public campaign financing system among people of color, younger, and lower-income Seattleites, according to a new report.

In addition to the above, more stories in the [Democracy](#) series covered the organizing of groups like the Defend Black Voters Coalition in Michigan, campaigning for voting rights:

- GM, Ford, and DTE Among Companies Funding Michigan Republicans Behind Voter Suppression Measure ([10-18-22](#))



DEMOCRACY

Protesters Target Michigan Businesses Over Voter Suppression

State business and political elites at the Mackinac Policy Conference were challenged by community groups over a Republican plan to pass new restrictions on elections and circumvent a veto from the governor.



DEFEND BLACK VOTERS COALITION
A member of the Defend Black Voters Coalition speaks at a hearing of the Michigan Public Service Commission in Detroit, July 2022

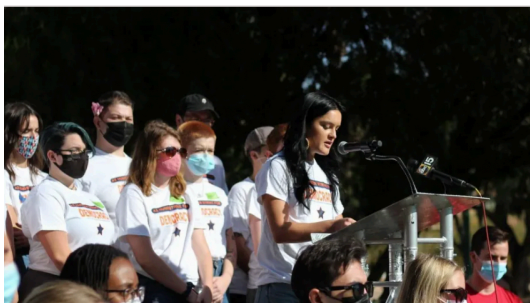
Hobbs said that BCBS executives had twice agreed to meet with the Defend Black Voters Coalition, only to cancel both times.

“At the end of the day, these corporations all came out in support of Black Lives Matter, and many signed a public letter standing against any form of voter

suppression,” Hobbs said. “But behind the scenes they fund the individuals trying to advance a Jim Crow-style voter suppression agenda in Michigan. They can’t have it both ways. We’ll continue to call out the hypocrisy until these corporations come to the table and commit to stop funding voter suppression efforts in Michigan.”

In 2023, Sludge seeks to continue this free-to-read coverage of local solutions to gridlock, reaching an audience of investigative journalists and political news editors:

- democracy voucher campaigns gathering momentum in more cities
- corporate accountability over voting rights and access to abortion care in states
- dark money nationally, and stronger disclosure measures at the state level



DEMOCRACY

Arizona Students Launch Hunger Strike to Pass Voting Rights Bill

Twenty young people at the Arizona Capitol are calling on Sen. Kyrsten Sinema to support a change in Senate rules and advance the Freedom to Vote Act.



DEMOCRACY

NYC Public Campaign Financing Program Levelled the Playing Field: Report

A new Brennan Center analysis found that New York City’s small-dollar matching program was key in electing record numbers of women and people of color to City Council.

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