

Fingas: Politicians take note — choose people over corporations or suffer the consequences

We've seen results of a government inclination to give corporations what they want while cutting what matters to people, writes Greg Fingas.

[Greg Fingas, Regina Leader-Post](#)

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Supporters of Democrat Abigail Spanberger, winner of the 7th Congressional District seat in Virginia, react as their candidate beats incumbent Republican Rep. Dave Brat. Bob Brown / AP

Over the past two years, a Republican party with control of the U.S. House, Senate and White House didn't do much of anything through the legislative process — with one crucial exception.

While ideological goals weren't enough to bring Republicans in line on any substantial legislation, the perceived need to serve deep-pocketed donors did the trick. And so the most significant legislative development from one-party rule in the U.S. was a tax cut bill aimed at getting the wealthiest Americans to open their wallets in order to fund Republicans' re-election campaigns.

This week, we saw the results of that effort. And they offer an important warning to any party which might be tempted to ignore the public in order to appease wealthy supporters and corporate interests.

While they managed to attract the intended influx of seven- and eight-figure donations, the Republicans also branded themselves as a party with little interest in the concerns of anybody outside the big-money donor class. Ultimately, a blizzard of ads funded through the sale of public policy couldn't make up for that perception — resulting in the Republicans losing control of the House of Representatives by a significant margin.

And that represented only the largest-scale example of corporatist politics meeting with severe public resistance even in a political system swamped by dark money.

In Kansas, Republican legislators had already started to work on reversing a disastrous experiment in trickle-down economics. But voters nonetheless elected a Democratic governor to avoid any move back toward austerity and inequality.

In Wisconsin, Scott Walker's tenure as governor met a long-overdue end — in no small part because his attempt to tie the state's economy to electronics manufacturer Foxconn resulted in the loss of billions of public dollars without actually providing anywhere near the promised economic results.

And in Michigan, the Republicans lost a hotly-contested race for governor in the face of a Democratic campaign built around the simple message of fixing broken corporate rule.

Other U.S. races produced a mixed bag of results, particularly where state-level demographics allowed racial resentment to carry the day. But even in the face of unlimited third-party spending, American voters took their opportunity to vote out the most glaring examples of public authority being used to benefit corporate interests.

Which leads to the question of when Saskatchewan's citizens will do the same.

We should expect our representatives to make sure public works projects do what they're supposed to — both by maintaining enough control to be able to take action, and by holding businesses accountable for their promises where necessary. But instead, the Saskatchewan Party is choosing to make excuses for the failings of the corporate conglomerate being paid billions of public dollars to take responsibility for designing and maintaining the Regina Bypass.

We should expect our representatives to respect and protect public spaces such as Regina's Wascana Park. Instead, the Saskatchewan Party is keeping open the option of further corporate development with no apparent public input, while labelling a for-profit takeover of park space as "philanthropy."

And we should expect our representatives to ensure that our communities benefit from infrastructure projects. But the Saskatchewan Party has instead taken the position that it sees increased profits for foreign operators as more important than good jobs and training opportunities for Saskatchewan workers.

Unfortunately, we've seen the results of a government's inclination to give corporations whatever they want while cutting what matters to people. And it's long past time for Saskatchewan's voters to join so many of our U.S. counterparts in saying we've had enough.

Greg Fingas is a Regina lawyer, blogger and freelance political commentator who has written about provincial and national issues from a progressive NDP perspective since 2005.