

What is the effect of big media and big money on political campaigns? The October 6 meeting* at the United Way provided insights from the moderator, the knowledgeable panelists and an attentive audience:

Moderator: Lee Coppola, retired Dean of the School of Journalism, St. Bonaventure University. He is a veteran journalist as well as a federal prosecutor.

Panelists: James Gardner, Interim Dean of the UB School of Law and distinguished professor

Jim Heaney, editor and executive director of the Investigative Post

Carole McNall, assistant professor at the Jandoli School of Communication at St. Bonaventure University

Insights from the session:

Social media has played a greater role in the last two or three presidential elections getting more information into the hands of those who are more difficult to reach through traditional media, namely the young millennials. For example, Bernie Sanders benefitted from the re-tweeting of messages.

Big money buys influence, persuasion and mobilizes the base of supporters. One example of effective mobilization is organized labor.

Corruption was defined as legalized influence of politicians where lobbyists even write the legislation.

Supreme Court decision on Citizens United removed a 100 year- old ban on contributions thus allowing corporations to contribute as much as they want directly, rather than through PACS. The result was an increase of contributions from \$243 million in 2008 to \$800 billion after the decision. Now no state has a ban on corporate spending.

Checking the \$3 donation to campaigns on your income tax return generates an insufficient amount therefore candidates such as Obama declined using it for the required costly marketing campaigns.

We are more informed and less educated. One of the reasons is that a balance of information is not available online even though research and distribution of information is better now.

Our society has been “dumbed down” with focus on celebrity, sports and entertainment. Not unlike food choices we need balance in our information rather than a steady diet of entertainment. We need to resist dependence on only one media source of information and the sound bites taken out of context.

The panelists reminded us that everyone is entitled to their own opinions but not their own facts. Their recommendation was to GET INVOLVED!

**This meeting was co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Buffalo Niagara, the Western New York chapter of the Women’s Bar Association, the Erie County Bar Association, and the University at Buffalo Law School.*