

Activists, journalists and celebrities team up to 'Unrig the System'

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During the welcome plenary at the Unrig the System Summit, Academy Award-winning actress Jennifer Lawrence interviewed former U.S. Federal Election Commission chairman Trevor Potter about how politicians push legal limits in accepting campaign contributions. (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)

Academics, activists, philanthropists and journalists convened on the uptown campus this weekend alongside celebrities, comedians and local musicians for the first-ever [Unrig the System Summit](#), a place to cross the country's partisan lines to address today's most pressing political issues.

The summit, which ran from Friday, Feb. 2, through Sunday, Feb. 4, was organized by [Represent.Us](#), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization launched in 2012 in response

to the rise of super political action committees (PACs).

“This weekend is our precious opportunity to build our own community of reformers, who conduct the latest research on election reforms, develop policies for better ethics enforcement and pass government corruption laws in our hometowns,” said Charlotte Hill, who hosted the weekend’s welcome plenary in the Lavin-Bernick Center with Kulpreet Rana, chair of the Represent.Us board.

Hill is the policy strategist for the Represent.Us advisory council.

After former Louisiana Gov. Buddy Roemer welcomed the crowd, which packed the Kendall Cram Lecture Hall, to New Orleans, Academy Award-winning actress and Represent.Us board member Jennifer Lawrence took the stage.

“In 2011, Stephen Colbert stunned America by starting his own super PAC, showing just how thin the line is between bribery and legal political contribution,” said Lawrence before conducting an interview with former U.S. Federal Election Commission (FEC) chairman Trevor Potter, the lawyer overseeing Colbert’s super PAC, about how politicians push legal limits in accepting campaign contributions.

Potter explained that while \$2,700 is the legal limit of funding that a contributor can give directly to a candidate, corporations and individual benefactors can exert their influence by funneling an unlimited amount of money into a candidate’s super PAC.

Potter added that the FEC has also never punished a candidate for coordinating with a super PAC.

“This is all really disturbing — bribery is legal in America. Corruption is legal. Are we at a tipping point?” asked Lawrence.

“The good news is that it’s not too late,” said Potter. “The FEC could update disclosure rules, enforce existing laws and crack down on this racket. That may not all happen today, but I think we have to work together to make it happen tomorrow.”

Packed with panels, debates and workshops, Unrig the System also offered participants the chance to take on local corruption. At Fighting Corruption in Louisiana, Matt Bailey, founder of [Fair Districts Louisiana](#); Rosalind Blanco Cook, Tulane adjunct professor of political science; Ashley Shelton, executive director of [Power Coalition](#); and Clancy DuBos, political editor of [Gambit Weekly](#), explored how

the rest of the nation can learn from our state's political history.

The summit culminated in a Saturday celebration called Unrigged Live! Live-streamed from McAlister Auditorium, the variety show hosted by Lawrence featured a live music lineup, appearances by comedians Tig Notaro, Nikki Glaser and Adam Yenser and speeches from Represent.Us director Josh Silver; [Our Revolution](#) president Nina Turner; former White House ethics lawyer Richard Painter; and former NASA astronaut Ron Garan.

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— Charlotte Hill, policy strategist for the Represent.Us advisory council



Former Louisiana Gov. Buddy Roemer welcomed the crowd, which packed the Kendall Cram Lecture Hall for the Welcome Plenary at the Unrig the System Summit. (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)