

# HUFFPOST POLITICS

## Recovering Democracy After *Citizens United*

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It's crazy that the Constitution has to be amended to clarify what for the majority of Americans is a clear and true statement: corporations are not people. But that's where we find ourselves today.

It's only been two years since the Supreme Court decided *Citizens United*, but we have already felt the devastating impact of the rollback of campaign finance reform. The 2010 midterm election was the most expensive in history, and corporate special interests spent hundreds of millions of dollars trying to elect people who would further line the pockets of big business.

*Citizens United* opened the door even further to allow Big Money to influence the political process. Corporations can now make unlimited campaign contributions from their general fund, allowing them to spend their customers' and shareholders' money on campaigns without consent or notice. In my home state of Maine, we've seen out-of-state groups with anonymous donors spend millions of dollars to campaign against issues that don't fit their agenda.

In Maine we are fortunate to have a Clean Elections system that allows legislators to turn down corporate special interest money. At the national level, Congress should follow Maine's example by empowering the voices of small donors. Legislation I have authored with Congressman John Larson, the bipartisan Fair Elections Now Act, would implement nationally what we have in Maine: a small-donor matching fund program to put citizens in charge of elections.

While a small-donor system nationally won't solve every problem, it will help. For a Washington already dominated by big business and special interests, the *Citizens United* decision has added yet another hurdle to preventing regular people from making their voice heard. The core of our democracy is that everyone has an equal voice -- to speak and to be heard. *Citizens United* undermines that key value by allowing corporations to spend enough money for their "speech" to drown out everyone else's.

Corporations serve an important purpose, but telling people how to vote isn't one of them. I'm more than happy to work with them to keep our economy growing and healthy, and to hear their feedback on policies. But their view should be balanced with those of the workers they employ, the customers they serve, and everyone else whose decisions they affect -- for good or bad. We shouldn't allow them any more opportunities to use money to tilt that arrangement in their favor.

Unlike Mitt Romney, I don't think corporations are people. Giving rights to a legal arrangement simply doesn't pass the straight-face test. (Most Americans agree, as recent surveys show.) Sadly, it seems we have to rewrite the Constitution to make that the law of the land, which is why I support a Constitutional amendment to declare what we already know: that the rights protected by the Constitution are those of people, not corporations.

Now more than ever, Washington needs to stem the flow of big money into the political process and loosen the hold of powerful lobbyists. But *Citizens United* has severely weakened our ability to do so. As a Congress, our focus should be on families trying to make a living in tough economic times -- not big corporations trying to influence lawmakers so they can squeeze out more profit.

We need to fix *Citizens United* so we can get back to that.