

U.S. Supreme Court Gives Corporations Personhood and Rights to Purchase Elections. Populace Gets Petition to Grieve.

by Mary Beaudoin

On January 21, the Supreme Court decided the case Citizens United versus the Federal Elections Committee and removed restrictions on corporate contributions to political campaigns.

Citizens United, a right-wing incorporated group, had brought an appeal to the Supreme Court regarding the airing of a politically-motivated On Demand video and ads for it. The group brazenly sued the Federal Elections Commission, claiming its freedom of speech had been violated and should have been protected under the Constitution's First Amendment Right. The Court ruled 5-4 in favor of Citizens United, overturning prior court decisions, including much of the McCain-Feingold Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2002.

However, this Supreme Court decision did not go unchallenged. In his dissenting opinion, Justice John Paul Stevens said the decision was a grave error in treating corporate speech the same way it treated human beings. On a grassroots level, a project of the Campaign to Legalize Democracy called Move to Amend immediately sprang up to say that the decision entitles corporations "to buy elections and run our government" and that "Human beings are people, corporations are legal fictions . . . In a democracy, the people rule . . . Money is not free speech." Move to Amend wants the U.S. Constitution amended to state what should be obvious but is not in the Law of the Land any more: "human beings, not corporations, are persons entitled to constitutional rights." It also hopes to guarantee participatory democracy on the part of said human beings and "protect local communities, their economies, and democracies against illegitimate 'preemption' actions by global, national, and state governments."

The right to "petition the Government for a redress of grievances" is also part of the First Amendment. Two days after the Supreme Court ruling, more than 33,000 people from all over the United States had signed the petition online at www.movetoamend.org It's heartening, but many more signatures are needed to counter the corporations who are redressing their next perceived "grievances."