

Why the Citizens United Decision Undermines Our Democracy and What We Can Do About It

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Washington, D.C. -- Following is a statement by CWA President Larry Cohen on the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision:

A corporation isn't a person. But the U.S. Supreme Court, in its Citizens United decision, had no problem granting corporations the First Amendment rights that citizens enjoy.

The court's 5-4 decision overturned federal and state campaign laws dating back to the early 19th century and declared that corporations have a constitutional right to use unlimited treasury funds to make so-called "independent expenditures" supporting or opposing candidates for public office.

It's true that the court's decision applies to unions, too. But CWA continues to support a ban on using treasury funds to support or oppose political candidates, for corporations and unions.

CWA, the United Auto Workers and the millions of active and retired workers that we represent know this is a flawed decision. It will allow corporations to dominate the political process, just like they are able to dominate the workplace, undermining laws that are supposed to protect worker bargaining and organizing rights.

Corporations will be able to use the millions in their treasuries to exert massive pressure on elected officials. Just the threat of a "Swift Boat" type campaign will be enough, in most cases. The result: the voices and interests of ordinary Americans will be lost and their faith in representative democracy undermined.

Until we can enact the real reforms needed, including public financing laws, CWA and the UAW are calling on Congress to act quickly and hold hearings that document the corrosive impact that these independent expenditure campaigns have on decision-making by public officials. Congress also must look to impose new requirements on corporate independent expenditure campaigns, including shareholder approval provisions and tougher disclosure and accountability measures.

Ultimately, our nation needs a Supreme Court filled with justices who understand that corporations aren't people and simply don't have the first amendment rights that citizens enjoy. That's the only way we will prevent corporate wealth from dominating our political process.

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