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JANUARY 21, 2010

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U.S. Supreme Court Strikes Down Campaign Finance Laws *Citizens United* Decision Could Unleash Flood of Money in Federal and State Elections

Charleston, WV —The U.S. Supreme Court today released its decision in the case *Citizens United v. FEC*, striking down a ban on independent expenditures by corporations. Today's decision will significantly expand the role of corporate money in elections and repealed more than 100 years of campaign finance law.

"We've seen what special interests with unlimited cash can do in West Virginia," said Carol Warren, chair of the West Virginia Citizens for Clean Elections coalition. "Today's Supreme Court decision makes a bad campaign system even worse."

"In past elections, out-of-state organizations like the Center for Individual Freedom have shown they are willing to spend whatever it takes to influence elections. Now such groups can use corporate cash to further their goals," stated Warren. "However, there is a solution to this debate about individuals and groups unfairly influencing our political campaigns. By adopting a voluntary system of public financing at both the state and federal level, we can make real people - rather than corporations - the voices with greatest influence in our public processes. The federal Fair Elections Now Act and the WV Clean Elections Act are our best options for constitutionally sound reform of our political process."

In its decision, the Court ruled that there can be no limits to independent expenditures by corporations aimed at electing or defeating a specific candidate. The Supreme Court declared outright – beyond overruling prior decisions – that corporate expenditures cannot corrupt elected officials, that influence over lawmakers is not corruption, and that appearance of influence will not undermine public faith in our democracy.

These are bald-faced, unsubstantiated claims that will change the ground rules of American democracy, starting today. Without a comprehensive response from Congress, elections will spiral into a fundraising arms race and war of negativism.

As Justice Stevens wrote in his dissent, “the Court’s opinion is thus a rejection of the common sense of the American people, who have recognized a need to prevent corporations from undermining self government since the founding, and who have fought against the distinctive corrupting potential of corporate electioneering since the days of Theodore Roosevelt.”

Stevens explained that corporations “are not themselves members of ‘We the People’ by whom and for whom our Constitution was established.” He lamented that the Court used

“a sledgehammer rather than a scalpel” when it struck down “one of Congress’ most significant efforts to regulate the role that corporations and unions play in electoral politics.” Justice Stevens reasoned that the Court negated Congress’ efforts “without a shred of evidence.”

Congress must respond swiftly and forcefully to ensure Americans that corporations do not take over the electoral process.

"The Supreme Court decision will perpetuate the alienation of voters who already feel their votes do not matter as the rights of those with the most money are protected to a much greater degree than those without the megabucks," said the Reverend Dennis Sparks, Executive Director of the West Virginia Council of Churches, an organization that has worked for fair elections for many years.

The bipartisan Fair Elections Now Act (H.R. 1826 and S. 752), introduced by House Democratic Caucus Chair John (D-Conn.) and Assistant Senate Majority Leader Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), would reduce the fundraising pressures on members of Congress. That bill would allow candidates to voluntarily opt out of the escalating fundraising race and run vigorous campaigns relying on small contributions and limited public funding. The House bill has 126 cosponsors - more than half the votes necessary for passage.

The Fair Elections Now Act is supported by a broad coalition of organizations and is modeled on successful state based programs. For more information on the bill please visit www.fairelectionsnow.org. To follow local reform efforts visit <http://www.wvoter-owned.org>.

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