



**American Independent
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**INDEPENDENT BUSINESS ADVOCATES AND PUBLIC
INTEREST GROUPS CONDEMN SUPREME COURT'S RULING
ON CORPORATE MONEY IN ELECTIONS**

**CALL FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO OVERTURN
COURT DECISION**

BOZEMAN , MT – A coalition of public interest organizations and independent business advocates condemned today's ruling by the US Supreme Court allowing unlimited corporate money in US elections, and announced that it is launching a campaign to amend the United States Constitution to overturn the ruling.

The coalition includes the public interests groups Voter Action, Public Citizen, and the Center for Corporate Policy, as well as the American Independent Business Alliance (AMIBA). They contend the Court's ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC* poses a serious and direct threat to democracy and to fair market competition. Immediately following the Court's ruling, the groups unveiled a new website – FreeSpeechforPeople.org – devoted to this campaign.

“The Supreme Court has leaped into unabashed activism on behalf of corporate power,” said Jeff Milchen, co-founder of the American Independent Business Alliance. “Some reports have wrongly suggested the Roberts Court is “pro-business,” said Milchen, “but overturning these precedents is radically anti-business when viewed from the perspective of America’s six million or so independent businesses.”

“Independent business owners often face a decidedly uneven playing field when competing against major corporations due, in part, to [tax loopholes](#), [subsidies](#), [federal handouts](#) and preferential treatment bestowed by politicians,” added Milchen. “Opening electoral contests to direct corporate campaign spending further undermines fair market competition and recklessly endangers democracy.”

[AMIBA](#) is a non-profit network of 70 communities across the U.S. that have formed local Independent Business Alliances to help local independent businesses compete successfully and prevent major chains from driving out local businesses.

"Free speech rights are for people, not corporations," says John Bonifaz, Voter Action's legal director. "In wrongly assigning First Amendment protections to corporations, the Supreme Court has now unleashed a torrent of corporate money in our political process unmatched by any campaign expenditure totals in US history. This campaign to amend the Constitution will seek to restore the First Amendment to its original purpose."

The public interest groups say that, since the late 1970s, a divided Supreme Court has transformed the First Amendment into a powerful tool for corporations seeking to evade democratic control and sidestep sound public welfare measures. For the first two centuries of the American republic, the groups argue, corporations did not have First Amendment rights to limit the reach of democratically-enacted regulations.

"Today's ruling, reversing longstanding precedent which prohibits corporate expenditures in elections, now requires a constitutional amendment response to protect our democracy," says Jeffrey Clements, general counsel to Free Speech for People.

Jennifer Rockne, AMIBA's director, added "Even before the banking meltdown, [ninety percent](#) of Americans thought large corporations have been granted too much power. It's a remarkable moment for the Court to re-invent the Constitution to expand corporations' influence and a slap in the face to America's independent business owners."

In support of their new campaign, the groups point to prior amendments to the US Constitution which were enacted to correct egregiously wrong decisions of the US Supreme Court directly impacting the democratic process, including the 15th Amendment prohibiting discrimination in voting based on race and the 19th Amendment, prohibiting discrimination in voting based on gender.

"The Court has invented the idea that corporations have First Amendment rights to influence election outcomes out of whole cloth," says Robert Weissman, president of Public Citizen. "There is surely no originalist interpretation to support this outcome, since the Court created the rights only in recent decades. Nor can the outcome be justified in light of the underlying purpose and spirit of the First Amendment. Corporations are state-created entities, not real people. Corporate spending on elections defeats rather than advances the democratic thrust of the First Amendment."

Milchen believes the effort will succeed, but makes no predication on a timeline. "This will be a sustained campaign that will ultimately unite the vast majority of Americans who recognize the Bill of Rights is for human beings, not corporations," said Milchen. "We have no illusions about the size of the task we are undertaking, but five Justices have effectively outlawed the republican form of government promised by our Constitution. We will be patient and relentless until we succeed."

For more information on the constitutional amendment campaign, see freespeechforpeople.org .