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PUBLIC INTEREST GROUPS APPLAUD REP. DONNA EDWARDS FOR FILING CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT BILL TO OVERTURN US SUPREME COURT RULING ON CORPORATE MONEY IN ELECTIONS

HOUSE JUDICIARY CHAIR JOHN CONYERS, JR JOINS FILING

"Free Speech Rights Are For People, Not Corporations"

WASHINGTON, DC – Congresswoman Donna Edwards of Maryland introduced today a constitutional amendment bill to overturn the US Supreme Court's recent ruling allowing unlimited corporate money in elections. Congressman John Conyers, Jr. of Michigan, the chair of the House Judiciary Committee, is a co-sponsor of the amendment bill.

A coalition of public interest organizations and independent business advocates praised the Congresswoman's action. The groups, Voter Action, Public Citizen, the Center for Corporate Policy, and the American Independent Business Alliance, say the Court's ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC* poses a serious and direct threat to democracy. Immediately following the Court's ruling on January 21, 2010, the groups launched a constitutional amendment campaign at www.freespeechforpeople.org to correct the judiciary's creation of corporate rights under the First Amendment over the past three decades.

"Free speech rights are for people, not corporations," says John Bonifaz, Voter Action's legal director and the director of www.freespeechforpeople.org. "Our history has included prior amendments to the US Constitution which were enacted to correct egregiously wrong decisions of the US Supreme Court directly impacting the democratic process. The Court's ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC* demands a similar constitutional amendment response. We applaud Congresswoman Edwards and Congressman Conyers for taking this critical step toward restoring the First Amendment to its original purpose."

"The *Citizens United* decision is wrong as a matter of law, history, and our republican principles of government," says Jeffrey Clements, general counsel to www.freespeechforpeople.org. "The decision is devastating to our democracy, which is already dominated to a dangerous degree by corporate interest money. Congresswoman Edwards and Congressman Conyers are showing the leadership we need in Congress at this hour."

"The First Amendment was never intended to protect the likes of ExxonMobil, Pfizer or Goldman Sachs, nor should it," said Robert Weissman, president of Public Citizen. "Public Citizen thanks Representative Donna Edwards for her courage and leadership in responding to the Supreme Court majority's aggression with a proposal for a constitutional amendment to restore the First Amendment to its rightful purpose: guaranteeing the speech rights of real, live persons."

"An amendment allowing regulation of corporate spending in elections is not only necessary to correct the twisted logic of the Citizens United ruling," says Charlie Cray, director of the Center for Corporate Policy, "but will also go a long way towards rousing us as citizens to assert our authority over the now presumptively untouchable corporations."

"The American Independent Business Alliance is pleased to see Representatives Edwards and Conyers respond to public outrage over the Supreme Court's rewrite of our Constitution," says Jeff Milchen, co-founder of the American Independent Business Alliance. "America's independent businesses are among those which recognize that we need to limit corporations to their appropriate role--doing business. Allowing giant corporations even more power over our elections and government would be as bad for business as it is for democracy."

In addition to the filing of Congresswoman Edwards' amendment bill, Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts joined the call today for a constitutional amendment. In testimony before the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, Senator Kerry said: "[W]e need a constitutional amendment to make it clear once and for all that corporations do not have the same free speech rights as individuals."

For more information on the constitutional amendment campaign, including a video interview of Congresswoman Edwards, see www.freespeechforpeople.org.