

The Hon. President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

RE: Take action on money in politics; immediately issue an executive order to promote transparency in government contracting

Dear President Obama:

Six years into your presidency, and five years after the Supreme Court issued its tragically misguided ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC*, we're now living in a Wild West campaign spending world:

- Big Money outside organizations are concentrating their spending in closely contested races and flooding money into elections, often outspending candidates themselves, defining campaign narratives and practicing the “gutter politics” you properly denounced in the State of the Union.
- In mockery of the majority opinion reaffirming disclosure in *Citizens United*, hundreds of millions of dollars are being invested in our elections by donors who remain anonymous, leaving voters in the dark about the people and interests to whom candidates are beholden.
- The staggering sums raised and spent are empowering a very narrow class of super-rich donors, with a self-interested agenda. They have undue power to affect who runs for office, who wins election, and what winning candidates do. And as you acknowledged in *The Audacity of Hope* – in the pre-*Citizens United* world – these individuals, across party, have a different worldview and different policy preferences than average Americans. Economic inequality and political inequality are now reinforcing each other – and choking democracy in the process.
- The *McCutcheon* decision and the increased campaign spending authorized in the December “CRomnibus” spending bill will bring even more money into future elections, further bolstering the power of the super-rich donor class.
- Candidates – including elected officials – must spend ever increasing amounts of time fundraising, further distancing themselves from the overwhelming majority of their constituents and leaving them with less time to study issues and develop sound public policies.
- This flood of big dollar contributions has overwhelmed the voices of everyday Americans, the very people who are our government’s prime constituents and who are supposed to count most in our democracy.

Against this backdrop, it is imperative that you act. There is no single solution to the problem of Big Money dominance. In fact, there are many desperately needed solutions. Today, we urge you to act on one option immediately – tackling the issue of corruption in government contracting.

As the dominance of Big Money continues to corrupt our democracy, the incentives are too great for federal contractors to spend money on elections in exchange for favors with contracts, service deals, leases and more.

We urge you in the strongest terms to issue immediately an executive order requiring full disclosure of political spending by business entities receiving federal government contracts, and furthermore require federal contractors to affirmatively certify that they are in compliance with 52 U.S.C. 30119 ban on direct or indirect political contributions.

While federal and state laws generally bar action to reward or penalize government contractors based on their political expenditures, the public perception that companies and executives who provide the most generous campaign financial support get special treatment has been validated too often by scandal.

An executive order shining a light on political spending by contractors would attack the perception and the reality of such “pay-to-play” arrangements. It need simply require that every federal contractor disclose its political spending and that of its senior management and affiliated political action committees post-contract award. By requiring this, the public may judge for themselves whether contracts are being awarded and administered based on merit rather than political favors, as the Court in *Citizens United* desired.

This kind of transparency in government contracting is nothing new at the state level. In response to numerous contracting scandals, more than a dozen states have imposed specific campaign finance disclosure requirements on government contractors.

At the federal level, many contractors are already required to disclose their PAC contributions and expenditures. The executive order would also require them to disclose the outside spending that was authorized by the Supreme Court in *Citizens United*.

The majority in *Citizens United* properly noted that disclosure requirements “do not prevent anyone from speaking.” The justices also declared that:

“Shareholders can determine whether their corporation’s political speech advances the corporation’s interest in making profits, and citizens can see whether elected officials are ‘in the pocket’ of so-called moneyed interests.”

The flip side of transparency is secrecy and the specter of hundreds of millions of dollars in secret campaign cash coming from companies that derive much of their wealth from government contracts. In order to keep in check actual or perceived corruption in government contracting, it is imperative that there be full disclosure of campaign contributions and expenditures by federal government contractors.

An Executive Order on government contracting would be just one modest step toward fundamental reform – but nevertheless a significant move forward.

We the People desperately need your leadership to preserve our democracy. Please act now.

Sincerely,

99 Rise

Alliance for a Just Society

American Family Voices

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
(AFSCME)

American Friends Service Committee

Americans Organized for Change

American Sustainable Business Council

Ben & Jerry's

California Clean Money Campaign

Campaign Legal Center

Center for American Progress

Center for Effective Government

Center for Media and Democracy

Center for Science and Democracy at the Union of Concerned Scientists

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington

Common Cause

Communications Workers of America

Courage Campaign

Democracy 21

Democracy For America

Demos

Earthworks

Energy Action Coalition

Everyvoice

Food and Water Watch

Franciscan Action Network

Free Speech for People

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Friends of the Earth

Global Witness

Government Accountability Project

Greenpeace

Harrington Investments, Inc.

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

International Brotherhood of Teamsters

Issue One

Justice Party USA

Main Street Alliance
Michigan Campaign Finance Network
Midwest Environmental Advocates
Money Out Voters In
MoveOn
NAACP
New Progressive Alliance
NorthStar Asset Management
Pax World Management, LLC
People for the American Way
People Demanding Action
Progressive Democrats of America
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Progressive Change Campaign Committee
Project on Government Oversight
Public Campaign
Public Citizen
RootsAction
Sierra Club
Social Equity Group
Sunlight Foundation
The People's Email Network
U.S. Public Interest Research Group
Women Donors Network
USAction
Young Democratic Socialists
Zevin Asset Management, LLC