

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

Fix American Democracy, Audacious Actions Needed

Dear President Obama:

Seven years into your presidency, and six years after the Supreme Court issued its tragically misguided ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC*, we're living in damaged democracy. The campaign spending world is out of control and the obstruction and partisanship of government has gotten worse as a result. We have been thrilled to see your strong rhetoric around fixing our process and an avowed commitment to do something about it. In this year's state of the union you said: "We have to reduce the influence of money in our politics, so that a handful of families or hidden interests can't bankroll our elections." Money in politics, disenfranchisement of voters, and a vacancy on the highest court of the land (with partisanship threatening to block efforts to fill the seat), all point to a need for action from the executive.

The system needs a course correction and the people know it. Three-quarters of the American people believe their government is corrupt, according to Gallup, and we need bold action by our leaders to show them that change is possible and engagement in democracy matters.

We need a democracy that works for all Americans, one in which everyone has an equal voice, we have a functioning court, and elected officials are accountable to the people, not the wealthy. The nation needs a Supreme Court that defends our democracy. With the *Shelby County* and *Citizens United* decisions in recent years, the Supreme Court has eviscerated crucial voting rights protections and enabled a narrow group of the superrich and giant corporations to dominate our elections.

Fixing our democracy and creating a better politics means dealing with many parts of the problem, inclusive of pushing back on the mockery being made of the majority opinion reaffirming disclosure in *Citizens United*, with hundreds of millions of dollars 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 elections, 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 and causing government obstructionism in the process.

Against this backdrop, it is imperative that you act. There is no silver bullet to solve the problems with our democracy, but there are many desperately needed solutions. Today, we stand

behind you as you work to fill the vacancy on the Supreme Court, and urge you to complement this with a policy package to improve democracy-- including 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.

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.

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.

As the current Congressional obstruction to filling the Supreme Court vacancy demonstrates, a bought Congress is a broken Congress, and we need real fixes coming from the highest level to make the case to the American people that democracy is still worth participating in.

We the People desperately need your leadership to preserve our democracy. Please act now to fill the court vacancy, and create real changes to our democracy through this executive order to cause transparency and other reforms of our process.

Sincerely,

American Family Voices

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

American Postal Workers Union (APWU)

Brennan Center for Justice

California Clean Money Campaign

Center for American Progress

Center for Biological Diversity

Center for Media and Democracy

Center for Science and Democracy at the
Union of Concerned Scientists

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in
Washington (CREW)

Common Cause

Communications Workers of America
(CWA)

CPD Action

DailyKos

Demand Progress

Democracy 21

Democracy for America

Democracy Matters

Demos

Every Voice

Franciscan Action Network

Friends of the Earth

Government Accountability Project

Greenpeace USA

Harrington Investments, Inc.

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility

Issue One

League of Conservation Voters

Mercy Investment Services, Inc.

Money Out, Voters In

New Progressive Alliance

Newground Social Investment, Inc.

Northstar Asset Management, Inc.

Pay 2 Play

People for the American Way

Public Citizen

Represent.Us

Rootstrikers

Sierra Club

Sonen Capital

SumOfUs

U.S. Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG)

Voices for Progress

Zevin Asset Management