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November 28, 2012

The Honorable Barack Obama
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

Numerous published reports indicate that your advisors are recommending you consider accepting corporate contributions to pay for the upcoming inauguration festivities. This is a patently horrible idea. When the American people watch you take the oath of office, they should not wonder if you are also obligated to corporate donors.

I am writing to urge you to exercise common sense and conduct a corporate-free, commercial-free inauguration.

It should go without saying that corporate funding and/or sponsorship of the inauguration and surrounding festivities is inherently corrupting. There is the very real risk of political corruption; that is, that the corporate donors to the inauguration will expect — and receive — something in return. The concern is less that they get a tax break in exchange for their million-dollar donation than that they get better access — their calls returned faster, their proposals reviewed in a more favorable light. Human nature being what it is, this problem is nearly unavoidable, even assuming top officials act in good faith and with no conscious intent to favor donors. Even more unavoidable is the appearance of corruption; there is no way for the American people to see major corporate names associated with the inauguration and not assume those corporations are paying for a lot more than the inauguration festivities.

Delayed by a day from the traditional January 20, this year's inauguration will be held on the anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's supremely misguided decision, *Citizens United v.*

Federal Election Commission. We are very pleased that you have stated not only that the decision was wrong, but that it is such a threat to the functioning of our democracy as to require a constitutional amendment to overturn it — and, with the election complete, we look forward to your stepped-up efforts to build support for, and enact, a constitutional amendment. It would be more than a bitter irony to have corporations sponsor or fund the inauguration on the anniversary of *Citizens United*; it would undermine the case for corporate-free elections.

Corporate donations would corrupt in another vital dimension, as well, transforming a public event into a commercialized one. The Wall Street Journal reports that advisors recommending accepting corporate contributions argue that “the inauguration [is] more of a civic event than a partisan political affair.” But as you surely must realize, that is no argument for accepting corporate contributions. The inauguration is as grand an official, public celebration as America has. Accepting corporate contributions would degrade and diminish the fundamentally public nature of the event itself.

It shouldn’t be a controversial proposition that public events should be supported by public funds. A basic nonpartisan framework should be settled upon for what constitutes an appropriate public outlay for the inauguration — well in advance of the next presidential election — and public inauguration festivities should be calibrated to that funding commitment. There is no need for a lavish event. On the other hand, even in budget-constrained times, the country is well able to afford a reasonable expenditure to celebrate our democracy and welcome the new term of a president.

We understand that recent tradition has involved accepting outside, private funding for inaugural events, and that there is a sense that available public funds are presently insufficient to cover costs associated with the festivities. In this case, accepting low-dollar donations from the American people would seem an appropriate remedy. In this context, you established the right precedent in 2009 in refusing corporate contributions for the inauguration. By reaffirming this approach, you can hopefully for the long-term place a proper boundary on corporate entanglement with the inauguration.

Some element of our democracy, at least, should be corporate-free.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Weissman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Robert Weissman