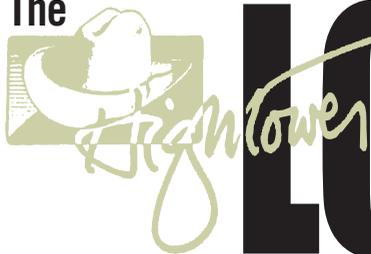


VOLUME 13 NUMBER 10 ♦ OCTOBER 2011

The



LOWDOWN

EDITED BY JIM HIGHTOWER AND PHILLIP FRAZER

“The people have the power
The power to dream
To rule
To wrestle the world
from fools.”
— Patti Smith

We the People *declare independence from corporate rule*

Citizens united against *Citizens United*: A grassroots campaign to restore democracy

THANK YOU MITT ROMNEY! Thank you for standing tall, speaking so forthrightly, and rallying so many democracy-loving Americans to join together in THE political fight of our time.

When this well-heeled seeker of the GOP presidential nod hopped atop a hay bale at the Iowa state fair in August, dressed in preppie-casual togs, he looked as natural as a goose in a tuxedo. But then, after a somewhat testy exchange with fairgoers who had challenged him to end corporate tax breaks rather than cut benefits for people, Romney punctuated his opposition to that idea by blurring out one of the stranger tenets of right-wing theology: “Corporations are people, my friend,” Mitt said, with a little condescending chuckle.

No, Mitt—actually, they are nothing but pieces of paper issued by state governments. Nonetheless, the rising supremacy of America’s corporate plutocracy is based on courts and politicians having blind faith in the legitimacy of the corporations-are-people idolatry. It is not, however, something that its disciples wish to take to the people as an election issue, because... well, because it’s poppycock, and it would be resoundingly rejected if it were ever put to a direct vote.

Romney, though, is a thoroughly corporate person—the privileged son of a Detroit auto honcho, multimillionaire former chief of a Wall Street financial outfit, and presently a politico stuffed with corporate campaign dollars. It’s understandable, then, that he would reflexively utter the explosive phrase that crystallizes the overarching democratic issue confronting our republic. So, let us praise this chucklehead for inadvertently injecting the right-wing fiction of corporate “personhood” directly into the 2012 presidential election.

Across the country, the overwhelming majority of people (i.e., us living, breathing *humans*) despise the anti-democratic domination of

our elections (and, therefore, of our government, economy, media, environment, etc.) by a relatively few self-aggrandizing corporate behemoths. This public anger has intensified since January 2010, when a corporatist cabal of five Supreme Court justices defied the Constitution, common sense, the often expressed will of the people, and nature itself to produce a twisted ruling in a case titled *Citizens United*. The five decreed that—*shazam!*—lifeless corporate entities are henceforth “persons” endowed with more electioneering rights than us real-life persons, enabling them to buy public officials by dumping unlimited sums of company cash into our elections.

Ironically, *Citizens United* (a case that was brought to the Court by an astroturf group fronting for right-wing corporate powers), literally united America’s citizenry in broad, deep, and vehement opposition to the absurd notion that a corporation is entitled to inclusion as one of us in “We the People.” In poll after poll, huge majorities consistently scream against the ruling and demand strong action against it. For example, a Hart Research survey in January—a year after the Court’s

edict was issued—found that public opposition remained fervent, with 87 percent of Democrats, 82 percent of Independents, and even 68 percent of Republicans favoring passage of a constitutional amendment to overturn *Citizens United* and to make clear that corporations do not have the same rights as people.

Supreme Court cases and arcane matters of campaign finance don’t usually move the needle of public awareness from “huh?” to “hot damn!” But the perversion of our politics and government by deep-pocket corporations has been like sticking the public’s tongue in an electric socket. People are energized by

it, and they’ve turned such terms as *Citizens United*, the Roberts Court, the Koch Brothers, SuperPACs, and corporate personhood into curse words. The issue has even become a comic punch line: “If corporations are people,” asked a letter writer to the *New York Times*, “can I marry one? Is General Electric single?” And here’s one from my state: “A corporation is not a person until Texas executes one.”



WHO'S MINDING THE SUPERCOMMITTEE?

WHEN THE 435 House members and 100 senators failed in July to agree on a long-term deficit reduction plan, the leaders appointed a committee. But don't sneer, for this is—cue the trumpets—a supercommittee!

Made up of only a dozen lawmakers and perfectly balanced between Repubs and Dems, this panel is to find about \$1.5 trillion in spending cuts and new revenues to shrink the federal deficit. The theory is that the group will be small enough to work together across partisan lines for the good of the country, free from the demands of special interests.

The problem with theories is that reality has a way of intruding on their perfection. In this case, the intrusion is literal. AT&T, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Citigroup, and GE will be there—not physically, but monetarily. These outfits are among the top donors of campaign cash to the twelve budgeteers.

Wall Streeters alone have invested \$17 million in the campaigns of the supercommittee's six Republicans and \$15 million in the six Democrats.

Meanwhile, Big Oil, the insurance giants, Wall Street bankers, and other corporate powers have mobilized lobbyists who're on a first-name basis with the members. About 100 staffers who used to work for the super Congress members have now been hired by corporations to lobby their old bosses. A couple of dozen of Sen. Max Baucus' former aides are now lobbying him and the other eleven deficit whackers to protect the subsidies that oil, insurance, and other corporations receive from us taxpayers.

And they wonder why Congress and corporate lobbyists rank below E. coli bacteria in public approval ratings.

Declaration of Independence From Corporate Power

I pledge my support for America's founding principle of government of, by, and for the People. I believe that a corporation is not a person, money is not speech, and corporate money should not be allowed in our country's elections.

I pledge to work with other grassroots Americans for reforms that will free today's politics from the dominating power of what Thomas Jefferson called "the aristocracy of our moneyed corporations."

(signed)

(city, state)

(email)

JOIN OUR "WE THE PEOPLE" CAMPAIGN!

We'll update you on the campaign, notify you about new actions to join, and provide information for your own grassroots organizing.

PLEASE SIGN OUR PEOPLE'S PLEDGE

REPRODUCE the pledge, CIRCULATE it and POST it so others can SEE it and SIGN, too (at work, on your website and other social media sites, in coffee shops, etc.)

MAIL YOUR PLEDGE TO:

We the People
70 Sea View Terrace,
San Francisco, CA 94121

SIGN UP ONLINE:

www.wethepeoplecampaign.org

TOGETHER WE CAN PUT THE MOVE
IN MOVEMENT!

The money dump

In response to such strong public outrage, our elected stalwarts in Washington have risen up and responded decisively. By doing exactly nothing.

Start with Republican leaders: Long wedded to the corporate plutocracy by ideology and money, they openly cheered the Court's move. Next, the Democrats: President Obama squawked briefly about the judicial hijacking of our democracy, and the party's congressional leaders flapped their arms in anger for awhile—but then they just let it go, slinking quietly away from the issue (though, importantly, a feisty Progressive Caucus in Congress continues to push the issue aggressively).

Tellingly, the new tea party Republicans, who had barged into the congressional club with thundering claims that they had come to "take our country back" and "restore power to The People," have been conspicuously silent on this most fundamental issue of the people's power. Far from ending Washington's corrupt business-as-usual system, they've slipped comfortably into it (see last month's *Lowdown*), with not a peep of protest over the fact that five unelected government officials have dictated that Big Money is a person with political "rights" to buy our government.

Now comes 2012, and tea partiers, Republicans, and corporate Democrats alike can be seen scurrying around like hunger-crazed squirrels in a frenetic grabfest for the tens of millions of dollars—even hundreds of millions—that Mitt's "people" are gleefully throwing around. America's grassroots majority is left gaping in dismay and disgust as the political establishment literally sells us out.

The 2012 money dump is well underway, and it is massive. The tip of this destructive iceberg is a legalistic gimmick known as the SuperPAC. Authorized by *Citizens United*, these are super-sized, super-energized, political action committees. Unlike the regulated PACs of yesteryear, SuperPACs can take tens of millions of dollars right out of corporate coffers (as well as from unions and individuals, but corporations are the monster players) and put the whole load directly into ads and other efforts to elect or defeat any candidate(s) they choose.

How big of a load? Just one of these money monsters, Karl Rove's "American Crossroads" raised a whopping \$28 million from corporate interests to elect

Republicans in last year's elections. But that's a mere trickle compared to the tsunami now headed our way—Rove's Crossroads PAC is presently amassing a democracy-shattering \$240 million for 2012.

Every major presidential candidate has at least one of these things sacking up and spending money specifically on their behalf. Rick Perry, for example, has six of them at work. Technically, SuperPACs are "independent" entities that must not coordinate their spending with the candidates they're supporting. This legal prohibition against coordination is absolute. And it's absolutely a farce and a fraud.

Take Perry's top SuperPAC, modestly named "Make Us Great Again," which intends to put \$55 million behind the Texas yeehawer's effort to win the GOP presidential nomination. It was created and is headed by Mike Toomey, who was a top corporate lobbyist in Texas before sliding over in 2002 to be Perry's gubernatorial chief of staff. In 2004, Toomey slid back into lobbying, using his tight ties to Rick to become Austin's preeminent corporate influence peddler and a prodigious fundraiser for the gov. Cozy.

This year Toomey helped his buddy set up his presidential campaign, serving as both advisor and fundraiser. So now, he runs the Make Us Great Again outfit, piously insisting that it is entirely separate from Perry's campaign. Hello—the PAC and the campaign don't have to "coordinate," because both are embodied in Toomey!

It's up to us

Do politicians think that people can't see their cynical and deliberate scamming of our "democratic" process? If so, they might peek at some of the letters, emails, and facebook messages I get practically every day. Not only do folks see it clearly, they're looking to join in some serious butt-kicking:

"CEOs represent a clear and present danger to the overall well-being and security of our country. Big money has plucked our eagle." —LARRY

"Multinational companies and bazillionaires are making our laws, and it is high time this stops. I will do what I can to push this issue. Please advise." —DENNIS

"We need to get under one umbrella. How can we do it? I'm so angry at the state of things. Still, I'm trying to stay positive." —MELODY

“I like the idea of petitioning to reverse the Citizens United decision. I would be pleased to help with the petition in Kansas if it gets going, or to start one. Where does one begin?” —ROBERT

“I am truly concerned. I want to know a way I can even mildly contribute to making people more aware of the reality that we face. Any information on how I can begin is much appreciated.” —JOSHUA

“THE most effective campaign to launch is to get every org to focus lobbying, dollars, and message on the one issue: END CORPORATE INFLUENCE AND POWER.” —CHRISTINE

With Washington turning its collective back on us, we have three choices: whine, give up, or organize ourselves.

Whining is pathetic, so forget it. Giving up is simply impossible, for the enthronement of corporate money in elections effectively ends any pretension that we are a self-governing people. This is not just another issue, it is central to practically every one of our issues, for it amounts to surrendering our democratic authority to (in Jefferson’s words) “the aristocracy of our moneyed corporations.” The Court and the political elites have forced you and me into another of those “When in the course of human events” moments that Jefferson wrote about in the *Declaration*. This is a BIG TIME in which ordinary people are called forth by history to do what our ‘leaders’ won’t: Assert the American people’s independence from authoritarian rule by corporate plutocrats.

We the People

So, let’s get to organizing. Along with Katrina vanden Heuvel, editor of *The Nation*, and Jay Harris, until recently publisher of *Mother Jones*, the *Lowdown* has launched a little rebellion to do two things: (1) focus the progressive media on raising public awareness (and blood-boiling outrage) about the usurpation of our democracy by corporate money; and (2) connect this rising awareness/outrage directly to some grassroots actions that people can take to stop this hijacking for once and forever.

Called the **We the People Campaign**, our insurgency has already enlisted a wide array of independent media outlets (including the *Lowdown*, alternative news weeklies, national magazines, political cartoonists, pro-

gressive television shows, community radio stations, bloggers, and social media) to team up this month in a cooperative effort to publish/broadcast a variety of stories about the corporate heist. Rather than just flinging out an occasional disjointed story, we’re sending out this powerful democratic message all at once, thus giving our independent progressive voices a megaphone effect that will echo across the land and reach millions of people who know little or nothing about the Supreme decreed “personhood” of *Citizens United*.

The truth might not set you free, but it can get you moving. To help mad-as-helliers move effectively, our **We the People Campaign** is working with dozens of excellent progressive groups that are ready and able to enroll local folks to help bring corporate arrogance to heel.

Beginning October 23, we’re coordinating with them on a “National Week of Action” to get corporate money out of our politics. The groups are seeking to sign up a million Americans in that week to join with them and other democracy fighters in this historic cause. To connect with the groups and get information about the campaign, go to **WeThePeopleCampaign.org**, or **facebook.com/wethepeoplecampaign** or on Twitter **@peep_power**.

The Powers That Be (and, sadly, too many progressive funders and cynics) want us to believe that this effort is hopeless, that we can’t really undo the legal scaffolding of artificial personhood that the *corporados* have erected over us flesh-and-blood citizens. Rather than attempting to deconstruct the Brave New America, they tell us, we should be satisfied with softening its rougher edges with things like campaign finance reporting requirements.

Now there’s a rallying cry for an angry public: “Give us campaign finance reporting regulations or give us death!”

How insulting to say that Americans today are too small to achieve big democratic results. And how erroneous. As a friend of mine notes, those who say it can’t be done should not interrupt those who are doing it. Here’s a partial menu of actions that are underway or that you could start right where you live:

AMEND. Two major coalitions are aggressively organizing grassroots power from coast to coast to demand and pass a constitutional amendment to prohibit cor-

WENDY’S “IMPROVED” BURGER

AT FIRST BLUSH, you might think that “Dave’s Hot ‘N Juicy” is the title of a pornographic movie. But, actually, it’s only a hamburger.

Well, not just any old hamburger. The Hot ‘N Juicy is the reinvented burger now being rolled out by the fast food giant, Wendy’s. In 2009, shortly after a hedge fund whiz took over the chain, a directive came down from on high to deconstruct and reconstruct the product, which had not changed since the company started 42 years ago.

Operating under the code name of Project Gold Hamburger, executives were deployed from corporate headquarters to travel across the country and surreptitiously measure burger characteristics in the products of competitors. A pickle chemist was brought in, a cadre of bun analysts worked on strength and texture, consumers were surveyed on preferences in lettuce crunch, and patty-press repetitions were tested to the Nth degree. Of course, the marketing people had to massage the makeover, and branding experts were hired to work their magic.

Finally, after two and a half years and millions of dollars—ta da!—The Hot ‘N Juicy is available for purchase. The result should not be taken lightly. Indeed, the “improved” Wendy’s has a fattier beef patty, a buttered bun, and whole fat mayonnaise—weighing in at 33 grams of fat and 580 calories per burger. That’s seven fat grams more and 70 calories more than the comparable quarter-pounder with cheese at McDonald’s.

If the hedge fund mag-nate really wanted a better burger, all he had to do was invite himself to a few backyard cookouts in any blue-collar zip code in America. That’s where you find hot and juicy.



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porations from buying our elections. Yes, this is a difficult and lengthy process, but as an old Spanish *dicho* puts it: "Big maladies require big remedies." The people have passed amendments before and we can again, especially for a cause that starts with such broad and passionate public support.

FreeSpeechforPeople.org proposes a straightforward amendment to repeal the Supremes' infamous *Citizens United* ruling. The coalition's battle cry is: Citizens united against *Citizens United*!

MoveToAmend.org proposes a broader amendment to declare that only human beings, not corporations, are persons with constitutional rights.

Both coalitions have grassroots organizers, do-it-yourself toolkits for raising the issue locally and getting others involved, petitions to be circulated and sent to public officials, videos and other graphic materials for getting people informed, sample resolutions for local and state officials to pass, ways to connect people to each other and to the national movement, and a wealth of other organizing ideas and resources.

UNCOVER. One of the little-noticed and unfulfilled promises included in the Court's *Citizens United* ruling is that corporations should at least have to disclose to shareholders and the public how much political money they spend on whom. Congressional Republicans, however, have blocked proposals to implement this minimalist democratic gesture, and President Obama so far has not issued administrative rules to shine even a little sunlight on secret electioneering by corporations.

But you don't have to wait on Washington. Citizen groups in such cities and states as Boulder, Minnesota, Montana, and Wisconsin have pushed disclosure requirements into law, and at least nine federal courts have ruled that these requirements pass constitutional muster. Also, groups in Los Angeles, Fort Wayne, Chicago, New Mexico, Connecticut, and elsewhere are pushing conflict-of-interest laws to ban or restrict campaign donations by corporations that seek government contracts.

In addition, employees and shareholders of some big corporations, along with other innovative citizens, have launched their own do-it-yourself disclosure campaigns. Using both inside tips and the occasional news leak of secret corporate donations, they are publishing the information à la WikiLeaks and holding protests at corporate offices to expose publicity-shy executives who're funneling shareholder funds into elections.

IMPEACH. At least two of the corporate-coddling Supremes—Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas—had undisclosed ties to the Koch brothers and other secretive corporate plutocrats at the time the Court was considering the *Citizens United* case (see *Lowdown*, February and August 2011). Two national organizations have extensive information about the justices' blatant disregard of basic ethics and are collecting petitions to hold them to account.

CommonCause.org seeks a Justice Department investigation of the

two and proposes the "radical" idea that Supreme Court members be subjected to the Judicial Code of Conduct that applies to all other federal judges. **RootsAction.org** goes further, calling for impeachment proceedings against Thomas for accepting gifts from participants in cases before him and for filing false financial reports.

CONNECT. It's not all bad news in Washington. Many members of Congress are pushing national policies to end or at least curtail the corrupting power of corporate political cash. It's important to have an inside-outside strategy on these policies, linking grassroots strength (ideas, courage, energy, and numbers) to those fighting inside for real reform. One of the best points of connection is the Progressive Caucus, co-chaired by Reps. Keith Ellison of Minneapolis and Raul Grijalva of Tucson. Find them at cpc.grijalva.house.gov.

CONFRONT. The time to get the attention of congress critters is now—when they're running for office. Every candidate (incumbent, challenger, Republican, tea partier, Democrat, et al.) should be confronted (politely, but insistently) on the corporate money issues—*Citizens United*, corporate personhood, public campaign funding, etc. Make appointments, attend their campaign events and town hall sessions, send queries—and disseminate their responses as broadly as possible, even if all you get from them is "tttthbbllllttt."

LOCALIZE. All across the country, clean election coalitions have passed laws to give local and state candidates the alternative of using a public pool of money to finance their campaigns, rather than having to kiss the ring of corporate interests. Learn about these successes and how you can launch a similar effort where you live by going to **PubliCampaign.org**.

Likewise, get information and inspiration from the **Program on Corporations, Law and Democracy (poclad.org)** and **Reclaim Democracy.org** about local communities that are restricting or outright rejecting the fiction of corporate personhood. From such small towns as Arcata, California to cities like Pittsburgh, people are uniting to prohibit assertions of a corporate "right" to run over them. As Pittsburgh city council member Doug Shields said of a successful effort last November to ban natural gas 'fracking' in his city, "It's about our authority as a community to decide, not corporations deciding for us."

ENJOY. Whatever you do, think fun: How could this be more humorous, more lively, more entertaining, more welcoming, more engaging—and, therefore, more effective? As much as possible, turn your meetings, work sessions, and events into parties, with a little food and drink, music, videos, cartoons, puppets, skits, stunts, contests, stories, and whatever else the group can think of.

Remember, the Constitution says "We the People," not We the Corporations.

PLEASE SIGN OUR "DECLARATION"—(PAGE 2)!

You can comment on stories in the *Lowdown* on the new and improved website

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CITIZENS UNITED AGAINST CITIZENS UNITED: A GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGN TO RESTORE DEMOCRACY

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