

Bracing for the Sequel: Court Could Expand Citizens United

After an election in which its decisions in *Citizens United* and other cases empowered corporations and wealthy individuals to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in political influence and access, is the Supreme Court getting ready to hand over even more clout to the richest Americans?

McCutcheon v. FEC, argued in early October, invites the justices to remove the overall, or “aggregate” limit that a person or group may contribute to candidates in an election cycle. The current cap is about \$123,000 in gifts to federal candidates and parties.

Common Cause joined in one of several “friend of the court” briefs in the

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Presidential Search Attracts Strong Field

The search committee screening potential successors to former Common Cause President Bob Edgar has been “bowled over by the high quality of candidates for the job” said Bette Marchant, senior vice president for finance and administration.

“It’s gratifying to see such impressive folks are eager to join in our work,” she said.

Edgar, 69, died suddenly on April 23 after his regular morning workout at home.



Building Towards a Great Democracy

The Common Cause Education Fund is launching a major initiative to develop a vision and strategies for advancing reforms that will enable the United States to reclaim its place – and chart its future – as a great democracy.

With generous long-term support from the Leonard and Sophie Davis Fund, Common Cause will convene an annual gathering of thought leaders, coalition partners and others to address democracy challenges, related particularly to the influence of money in politics and barriers to participation in our democracy.

The annual conference will be called the Blueprint for a Great Democracy. The first convening is scheduled for Dec. 10-11 in Washington DC.

A key element of this initiative is the George S. McGovern Great Democracy Fellowship program. McGovern Fellows, including scholars, reform leaders and other creative thinkers, will have a unique platform to advance reform ideas to the media, the democracy reform movement and the public to make

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concrete contributions toward advancing reforms that increase civic engagement and promote accountable government.

The first class of fellows includes:

Vance Hickin, a digital strategist and consultant specializing in programs for the public sphere. He is principal of Highway One Consulting LLC and in 2012 was California Digital Director at Obama for America.

Zephyr Teachout, associate professor of law at Fordham University and an expert on the Internet's impact on electoral politics; and

Tracy Westen, founder of the Center for Governmental Studies, which strengthens democracy through research, strategic consulting and online information systems. Tracy has written extensively on innovative political and media solutions to help people participate in democracy. He is a former communications law professor at USC Annenberg School for Communications and Journalism and UCLA Law School.

The McGovern fellows will focus on strategies for increasing electoral participation, with emphasis on breaking down barriers to participation by minorities, young adults, and low income Americans. More information on the fellows program and on the Blueprint for a Great Democracy conferences is available at www.commoncause.org/blueprint.

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Comic Spotlights Verizon Plan To Dominate Internet

Common Cause partnered with Symbolia Magazine this fall to publish “Big Deal, Big Money,” an online, interactive comic explaining Verizon’s bid to overturn “Open Internet” rules that have helped make the Internet a central part of modern life.

The comic was viewed more than 95,000 times in just the first 24 hours following its publication. It’s available on our website at www.commoncause.org/bigdealbigmoney.

“Verizon wants to impose special fees for customers to access popular websites and applications,” said Todd O’Boyle, director of Common Cause’s Media and Democracy Reform Initiative. “We’re excited to be able to use this form of media to mobilize activists to fight back.”

Veteran Fundraiser Nancy Sturm Joins Common Cause

Nancy Sturm, who has spent 25-plus years studying and strengthening resource development efforts for non-profit organizations, is Common Cause’s new managing director of development.

Sturm came to us in July; she most recently filled a similar position at the League of Women Voters.

“The success of Common Cause depends on tens of thousands of deeply committed supporters across the country,” Sturm said. “It’s a privilege to be able to work with them.”

Common Cause Blows Whistle on 'Dark Money' in California Contest

A pair of Arizona non-profits that funneled \$15 million from secret donors into two California ballot initiative campaigns in 2012 – and were flushed out thanks to a complaint from California Common Cause – have agreed to pay \$1 million in fines to the state.

The California Fair Political Practices Commission will collect the record fine from Americans for Responsible Leadership and the Center to Protect Patient Rights; both groups are linked to billionaire industrialists and conservative activists Charles and David Koch.

"We've sent a message to those who wish to use dark money in elections: you'll be caught!" said California Common Cause spokesman Phillip Ung.

A complaint last year from California Common Cause led to a state investigation of \$11 million donated by Americans for Responsible Leadership for ads promoting the defeat of a tax measure pushed by Gov. Jerry Brown, and the approval of a separate initiative that would have curbed the ability of labor unions to raise money for political campaigns. The commission said the money, and a similarly hidden \$4 million gift to another group, the California Future Fund, were transferred from the Center for Protect Patient Rights, another Koch-backed entity.

Holiday Deal: Strengthen Our Democracy AND Get a Tax Break

A year end gift to Common Cause will get our work to deliver open, honest and accountable government off to a strong start in 2014. And if you direct your donation to the Common Cause Education Fund, our 501 (c)(3) affiliate, it will be tax-deductible in accordance with the law.

The Education Fund supports our research and educational efforts, including work to inform citizens about legislation that could endanger their right to vote and the steps they can take to protect that right. That will be especially important in 2014, an election year.

For more information, contact Nancy Sturm at 202 736-5713 or at nsturm@commoncause.org

IN THE STATES

Legislatures adjourn and the pace slows in state capitols during the summer months, but Common Cause keeps up the momentum for democracy reform.

Connecticut

Common Cause is gearing up to secure voter approval in 2014 for major legislation modernizing the state's elections. The plan will permit early voting and no-excuse absentee voting in the Nutmeg state.

Illinois

As the billionaire Koch brothers angled to buy the Chicago Tribune and other papers and convert them into propaganda sheets, Common Cause persuaded the Chicago City Council to pass a resolution supporting local ownership. The Kochs ultimately withdrew their bid.

Massachusetts

A pair of studies by Common Cause has underscored the value of the "People's Pledge," an agreement between 2012 U.S. Senate candidates Elizabeth Warren and Scott Brown that largely kept "outside money" out of their contest, enhancing the importance of small donations from individuals. The pledge has garnered strong public and editorial support; Common Cause is working to make it a fixture of future state campaigns.

North Carolina

Common Cause is at the center of a drive to upend a new voting law that could take tens of thousands of NC residents off the voter rolls. We've joined in a lawsuit challenging the law's constitutionality and joined in weekly "Moral Monday" demonstrations against the law at the Capitol.

Oregon

Lobbying by Common Cause was central to the legislature's approval of a resolution calling on Congress to pass a constitutional amendment overturning the Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United*. Oregon became the 16th state to endorse the amendment.

McCutcheon v. FEC Rally U.S. Supreme Court October 8, 2013



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case, urging the justices to uphold the limits as a check against corruption in government.

“Whether in Washington, at the statehouse or at city hall, major donors get major access to the officials that their money helps elect; their lobbyists are invited to help write and amend laws, and they are rewarded with government jobs and tax breaks,” Common Cause said in a press release on the day of the argument.

The release added that the plaintiff in the case, Alabama businessman Shaun McCutcheon, essentially is seeking “the right to purchase political influence.” Existing donor limits “allow Mr. McCutcheon and other wealthy donors to spend more than enough money to make their views known to their representatives and their fellow citizens,” the release said.

Dozens of Common Cause volunteers and staff also took part in a rally outside the Court as the justices considered the case inside. Speakers included Mary Boyle, (upper right) Common Cause’s vice president for communications. Below, longtime volunteer Bob Leventhal (L) stands with Common Cause digital producer Jack Mumby and digital strategies manager Marissa Valeri.

A New Look

Commoncause.org, our online home, is getting a makeover. We’re overhauling the website to give it a fresher, bolder look and make it easier for visitors to learn about our work to deliver open, honest and accountable government across the country. Most importantly, the revamped site will do more to help our activists connect with one another and with our state and national offices. Look for the changes early in 2014.