

## Flawed ruling intensifies push for clean elections

By

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The U.S. Supreme Court decision opening a floodgate of corporate and union spending to influence U.S. elections immediately inspired a backlash in the form of rising support for public campaign financing.

The day after the high court's 5-4 ruling recast the political landscape ahead of the 2010 midterm elections, dozens of current and former corporate executives sent a letter to members of Congress through the good-government coalition Fair Elections Now urging them to approve public financing for House and Senate campaigns.

The 40 signers said they are tired of being hit up for campaign donations, and fear the requests will only intensify after the bitterly divided court reversed the decades-long trend of restricting corporate muscle on the political scene.

Not everyone hates the ruling, of course. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce—which according to the Washington Post spent \$136 million on political lobbying last year, not including its efforts against health care reform—hailed it as a victory for free speech and the First Amendment.

But numerous other groups, including Common Cause and Public Campaign, deemed it a corporate coup d'etat that puts the U.S. model of representative democracy at risk—allowing deep-pocketed special interests to drown out the voices of the average voter, political parties and even the candidates themselves. We agree.

Besides allowing corporations and unions to spend unlimited money on ads for or against specific candidates, the court also lifted a ban on ads in the closing days of campaigns. We can expect a barrage of attack ads right up until Election Day, which in Hawaii should only serve to alienate an already disengaged electorate.

The ruling's impact is more limited here than in many other states, given that corporations and unions already are allowed to run their own ad campaigns for or against specific politicians in state and county elections. However, voters can expect a surge in outside advertising in the 1st Congressional District election, leaving the candidates less in control of their own campaigns.

Voters who had a passing interest in public campaign finance prior to Thursday's decision are on full alert now, and Fair Elections Now is ready to capitalize on it.

The Fair Elections Now Act pending in the House and Senate blends small donor fundraising with public financing to reduce the need for major contributors.

By overreaching on what could have been a far more narrow ruling, the activist Supreme Court may well propel a cause the court majority obviously disdains.

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500 Ala Moana Blvd. #7-210, Honolulu, HI 96813 808-529-4747

