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Get Big Money Out of Politics To Eliminate Government Corruption

By David Monk | 01/15/2014

Peter Kay writes (1/8/2014, "How to Reduce Government Corruption") that those who seek to control money in politics as a means of reducing corruption have it backwards: If money is curtailed as a tool, he says, those seeking special favors will find other means to influence political decisions. To summarize his remedy for corruption: take away the power of politicians to grant special favors; ban legislation that targets any industry for special benefit or "punishment."

It is Mr. Kay who puts the cart before the horse. To enact the measures he favors, it would be necessary first to elect legislators not beholden to special interests for their positions. How is that possible in a system that requires mountains of cash to run and win, with few limits on how much big donors may contribute? Where will these impartial reformers get their campaign funds?

His goal, too, is questionable. In effect, he argues that all power corrupts, so the only way to defeat corruption in government is drastically to curtail government power. His argument is really that of a classic, small-government conservative, cloaked in a pro-reform package designed to appeal to good-government progressives. In the comments below his article, Mr. Kay revealingly elaborates, explaining that government regulation is not needed to curb corporate excesses or negligence: "Corporations MUST serve the public good or they will not be in business for very long ... A corporation that does not serve the public good (i.e. provide a product or service at a profit, valued by the public) simply cannot exist according to the laws of mathematics."

This is, to put it mildly, a narrow definition of "serving the public good." In the 1960s and '70s, when urban air was semi-opaque, rivers were flammable, acid rain was killing off life in lakes, and many children had elevated levels of lead in their blood from automobile exhaust, by this logic, there was no need for the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, or the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency.

In his article, and also in the comments section, Mr. Kay suggests that removing big money from politics would be ineffective, because other means remain to buy favors - "very high paying jobs or board positions ..." In fact, there are laws on the books regulating this sort of quid pro quo. If need be, they can be further strengthened.

What is crystal clear, though apparently not to Mr. Kay, is that the vast sums of money from big donors to candidate campaigns and to "social welfare organizations" designed to evade campaign regulations exert inordinate influence. No other factor comes close.

A series of Supreme Court decisions tossing out limits on political donations and spending has left only one path to address this growing cancer on our politics. We must amend the U.S. Constitution to (1) strip away the insidious, judicially mandated accretion to corporations of rights that were originally intended only for human beings, and (2) clarify that money is not identical to speech, and may be regulated in the interest of fairness and transparency. Common Cause is one organization actively working to [promote such an amendment](#).

About the author: David Monk is a retired Foreign Service officer with the U.S. Department of State, a resident in Honolulu since 2005, and active with [Common Cause Hawaii](#) on the [Only People Are People](#) initiative.

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Discussion

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 **Simon Russell** · Top Commenter · University of Hawaii
Ban corporate person hood (Amend the Constitution)...that would be the beginning of some real progress to bringing politics back to the "People".
Reply · Like · 1 · January 21 at 1:27am

 **David Monk** · Yale University
Exactly. That's the goal of efforts by Common Cause and other organizations like people for the American Way and Move to Amend that are promoting amendments. The more people get actively involved by writing to their congressional delegations, supporting ballot initiatives (where available) and legislative resolutions, or at a minimum, signing online petitions posted by the above-named organizations and several U.S. senators, the greater the chance of moving an amendment forward.
Reply · Like · 2 · January 22 at 5:24pm

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Contributor



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amend what exactly David Monk? Explain to me what u mean by incorporations meant for human beings vs business org.zn.. Finally Mr. Monk how is it that in the interest of fairness and transparency would you criticize smaller government as a bad thing. Here 4 all u analyst and smart aristocrats and brainwashed bureaucrats. Take away immunity from Judges. I heard someone say if I own a nations debt I care not who makes their laws. figure it out!

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