

## Ruling unlocks big bucks for elections

By

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A U.S. Supreme Court decision yesterday opened a new path for corporations and unions to influence federal elections in Hawaii.

Corporations in Hawaii are already permitted to run their own ad campaigns for or against a politician in a state or county election. However, the ruling could affect the heated 1st Congressional District special election.

"In terms of Hawaii directly, it will affect the federal campaigns," said Nikki Love, Common Cause Hawaii spokeswoman.

The decision allowing corporations and unions to produce and run campaign ads urging the election or defeat of particular candidates by name was praised by some Republicans and condemned by other politicians, including President Barack Obama, who called it a victory for big oil, Wall Street banks, health insurance companies and other powerful interests.

U.S. Rep. Mazie Hirono said the ruling was "another nod to the wealthy corporate interests in this country." "This ruling now allows big corporations to spend large amounts of money to influence elections far beyond the ability of individual Americans."

Love said instead of being a "nod," "it was more like a huge high-five."

Barbara Wong, state Campaign Spending Commission executive director, said Hawaii law already allows corporations and unions to make independent expenditures in local races.

"As long as they don't coordinate with the candidate, they can spend as much as they want," Wong said.

Love said Hawaii's campaign laws "were already bad. I'm hoping this will bring some attention to it and spark reform either through public funding or increased public disclosure."

Local lobbyist John Radcliffe agreed with the court ruling, saying "it was a free-speech issue." "It will change things because now corporations can give money from their corporate treasuries."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.



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