

Merkley: Amend constitution so corporations not considered people

By **DON McINTOSH**
Associate Editor

Boiled down to essentials, Occupy Wall Street is about the growing divide

between the rich and the rest of us ... and the increasing domination of the political system by corporations and the rich.

Last month, nine U.S. senators took aim at the latter with a bill to amend the U.S. Constitution. Senate Joint Resolution 29 would restore to Congress and

states the power to regulate corporate spending in elections. Historically, Congress and the state have had that authority. But on Jan. 21, 2010, a 5-4 majority of the U.S. Supreme Court struck down some restrictions on corporate spending in political campaigns in a case called Citizens United. Amending the Constitution would prevent the court from striking down similar legislation in the future.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) was one of the original co-sponsors of SJR 29; 10 others have since signed on, bringing to 19 the number of senators sponsoring the resolution. And 14 members of the U.S. House have signed onto companion resolutions in the House, including Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) and Jim McDermott (D-Wash.) An online petition in support of the amendment — at reversescitizen-unionited.com — has 120,000 signatures.

The amendment is simple: “Congress shall have power to regulate the raising and spending of money and in-kind equivalents with respect to federal elections, including through setting limits on the amount of contributions to candidates for nomination for election to, or for election to, federal office; and the amount of expenditures that may be made by, in support of, or in opposition to such candidates.” Section 2 declares that states have the same power.

To amend the U.S. Constitution requires a two-thirds vote in the House and Senate and then ratification by three-fourths of the states.

“I understand how difficult amending the constitution can be,” said Tom Udall (D-N.M.), introducing the resolution. “But I also believe that momentum is growing to reign in the out-of-control campaign spending. Just because getting a constitutional amendment through Congress and ratified by the states is extremely difficult, it doesn’t mean we shouldn’t try. We

know our founders did not intend for elections to be bought and paid for by undisclosed donors operating through secretive organizations — that is the antithesis of democracy, and we must do everything possible to address the problem.”

Meanwhile, a group called Move to Amend has gathered 150,000 signatures in support of a similar constitutional amendment, declaring that:

- Corporations are not people, and that rights protected by the Constitution apply to people, not to corporations; and
- Money is not speech, and can be regulated.

The group is planning a one day “occupation” of federal courthouses, including the U.S. Supreme Court, on Friday, Jan. 20, 2012, to protest the Citizens United decision.



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