

THOM HARTMANN, from page 1

we all know that they're not natural persons and the First Amendment was not written for corporations, it was for natural persons.

It seems the only way to solve this problem — because the Supreme Court has taken this bizarre position that has evolved over the years increasingly in the direction of a corporate state — is to amend the Constitution, to simply say corporations do not have the rights of natural persons, do not have the rights under the Constitution other than creatures of law as artificial persons, and that money is property, not speech. And that's what Move to Amend is promoting and I think that that's the right way to go.

J.Z.: What has the damage been from Citizens United?

T.H.: We have massive amounts of money flowing into our political process in ways that are virtually untraceable. Much of it coming from corporations and persons and perhaps even governments outside of the United States whose interests may not even be congruent with the United States.

Under Citizens United, Osama bin Laden could create an American corporation and channel money through it and create a PAC and support political candidates. And for all we know, al Qaeda actually has done that. It's entirely possible.

J.Z.: The amendment talks about prohibiting influence on elections and politics. How could this be monitored or enforced?

T.H.: Well, you're never going to be able to do this perfectly, human beings being as they are. But once you allow Congress to pass laws that regulate money in politics, I think that there will be a very rapid bipartisan consensus that it is something that should be done and be done quickly.

Right now, the average member of the House and Senate has to spend roughly half of all their time raising money. There are offices in the building where I do my radio program that are rented by members of Congress. I constantly bump into them in the elevator, and they come over at noon and they're there until 6 p.m. just dialing for dollars. Every member of Congress has one of these places where every day they just sit on the phone begging for money. Republicans and Democrats alike hate this ... I think that you would very quickly see people willing to redo McCain-Feingold, only far more aggressively and far more effectively, to regulate the money in their elections and we might even get publicly funded elections.

The second part is, if we are to say that corporations are not persons, this has huge ramifications beyond politics. It would mean that many of the remedies that corporations have been using to assert their power over "we the people," whether it's genetically modified foods or corporate secrecy and privacy rights or corporate rights to lobby — fill in the blank — would all be subject to congressional action.

If Congress no longer needs to and Congress go to them for money and Congress were to pass laws stopping the revolving door for staff, then I think you could see a very cleaned-up political process where we return to something that we've been close to on occasion in this country.

J.Z.: Critics would say that it still comes down to the voters. Don't we still elect our representatives?

T.H.: Arguably. But there is a reason why the advertising industry is a multi-hundred-billion-dollar, perhaps trillion-dollar, industry. It works. If you run enough ads for a particular drug, or cosmetic, or soap, its sales will overwhelm that of its competitors. And similarly, if you run enough ads for a



particular politician, that politician is going to get elected. It's pretty simple math.

J.Z.: One version of this proposed amendment states that it shall not affect the media from reporting facts to the people. Why is that in this amendment?

T.H.: That's in there because you don't want to amend the Constitution in a way that directly contradicts the Constitution. There is only one industry that the framers felt needed protection. It wasn't making cannons, or battleships, or armies. They didn't think that was so important. It wasn't buggy whips or transportation. It was the press. They felt that the press was actually an agency of the government. It was the Fourth Estate. This was the ultimate power of the people to be well informed and thus make appropriate choices about who was going to govern them and how.

So that protection of the press is enshrined in the First Amendment. If you are going to amend the Constitution in a way that limits money, speech and corporations, and the press by and large are corporations, it's just prudent to make it very clear that we are not infringing on freedom of the press.

J.Z.: This amendment is gaining momentum. I've read that 13 states are supporting some version of Congressional action against corporate personhood. Are you hopeful this will happen anytime soon?

T.H.: I am. I think people are so fed up, I think we will see this resolved in five to six years, maybe less. It is picking up steam. State after state, county after county, city after city — pretty much wherever this is presented as a ballot issue, people overwhelmingly vote for it. And not people of any one party. Republicans vote for it. Democrats vote for it. Libertarians vote for it. This is not a partisan issue, this is a common sense issue.

J.Z.: Speaking of partisan issues. Congress recently voted down even minor efforts to augment gun-control laws, despite the fact that more than 90 percent of the public polls in favor of the changes. What's your position on what happened?

T.H.: I think we just saw a very clear example of the power of a small group of corporations, who were never named, by the way, because they have a front group, the NRA. You saw the power of a handful of very large, very powerful, very wealthy corporations who make a lot of money selling guns and ammunition. You saw their power to threaten and intimidate members of Congress. It's that simple. And it's a great example of why we need to overturn Citizens United. ... It doesn't just affect politics. It also affects corporate control of our lives.

J.Z.: Looking at the larger picture, what is your prognosis for progressive politics? There are a lot of cynics, despite the re-election of

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How to get involved

■ Attend the Move to Amend Northwest Regional Grassroots Democracy Convergence on May 3-5, in Portland, with David Cobb and many other speakers

■ Go to www.oregonrestoresdemocracy.org to sign up on this coalition website to stay informed, to get involved with their "rolling legislative lobbying" and to find out about upcoming events

■ Call or write the legislators on the House Rules Committee asking them to ensure a work session on HJM 6 and then to move it out of their committee to the House for a vote

President Obama.

T.H.: Things have gotten radically better in a whole variety of directions. Can you imagine how George Bush would've reacted to the Boston bombing once it came out that these brothers were Muslim? We'd be invading Chechnya or in a nuclear war with Russia. Thing could be a lot worse, and they were a lot worse.

I think that, frankly, we expected Franklin Roosevelt when we elected Obama and there were some very big differences between Franklin Roosevelt and Barack Obama. The first was that when Roosevelt came into office, the Americans had seen almost four years of a God-awful depression that was clearly caused by nine years of Republican policy and was made worse by four years of Republican austerity as a reaction to it. And there was no debate about what needed to be done. In fact, Hoover himself in his last months began moving in the direction that FDR eventually went with the New Deal and trying to stimulate the economy, borrowing money and spending it. So FDR had an absolute consensus behind him. He had a wind behind his back. Even Republicans were lining up with him in many cases.

Two, he had an absolutely overwhelming majority in both the House and the Senate. There was basically no piece of legislation he couldn't pass. The problem he had was the Supreme Court; they kept knocking down things that he passed. And in 1937, he tried to pack the court, and just that threat caused the court to change their behavior.

So when Obama came into office, we hadn't had four years of mind-boggling pain. What we had had was a few months of a freak-out, and Obama actually got that under control fairly quickly. Not as good as he arguably could have, but he stopped the bleeding. The pressure was off.

I am personally of the opinion that because we have not seen any genuine transformations or repairs to the financial systems, or to our trade systems, or to our industrial systems or economic policies, there is going to be another crash. When that crash happens, it is going to be big. It is going to be bad. Republicans are going to do everything they can to make it happen

A 28th amendment?

Several proposals have been circulated to create a 28th amendment to the U.S. Constitution. This is the version from the national coalition Move to Amend:

Section 1. [Artificial Entities Such as Corporations Do Not Have Constitutional Rights]
The rights protected by the Constitution of the United States are the rights of natural persons only.

Artificial entities established by the laws of any state, the United States, or any foreign state shall have no rights under this Constitution and are subject to regulation by the people, through Federal, state, or local law.

The privileges of artificial entities shall be determined by the people, through Federal, State, or local law, and shall not be construed to be inherent or inalienable.

Section 2. [Money is not free speech]
Federal, state, and local government shall regulate, limit, or prohibit contributions and expenditures, including a candidate's own contributions and expenditures, to ensure that all citizens, regardless of their economic status, have access to the political process, and that no person gains, as a result of their money, substantially more access or ability to influence in any way the election of any candidate for public office or any ballot measure.

Federal, state, and local government shall require that any permissible contributions and expenditures be publicly disclosed.
The judiciary shall not construe the spending of money to influence elections to be speech under the First Amendment.

Section 3. Nothing contained in this amendment shall be construed to abridge the freedom of the press.

before the next election and blame it on the Democrats. Although that may backfire because people are getting it that Republicans are driving this austerity agenda. It's going to take something like that to flip the House. Remember, there were only two and a half months during the Obama presidency that he had a filibuster-proof Senate. It was nine glorious weeks!

So, if we can reclaim the House in the election of 2014 and hold the Senate, then Harry Reid rolls back the filibuster, then we can get a lot done the last two years of the Obama presidency. That means we can't sit around being the circular firing squad complaining about the things we don't like. It's fine to talk about them, but to do so in a way that causes people to become discouraged or cynical about the political process is exactly what the Republicans want us to do.

J.Z.: Are you looking forward to visiting Oregon again?

T.H.: Oh yeah. I love Oregon. What was originally going to be one 1-hour speech has turned into a couple different presentations in a couple different cities. So I am not sure what I am going to be doing beyond that. I will be visiting with my three kids. Dalo's Ethiopian Restaurant is the one thing I know I'm going to do while I'm there. It's my favorite restaurant in town. So I'd like to give a shout-out to them.

Many thanks to all of our volunteers who contribute their time and energy toward Street Roots! Inquire about volunteering at www.streetroots.org/volunteer.