

OPINION

Danger of Invisible Corporate Power

Our country is in a death grip

BY JOHN STEEL

Let's face it: Large corporations have our country, and us, in a death grip. Some of their bad behavior makes big headlines: the BP oil disaster, Goldman Sachs' financial shenanigans, Enron's book-cooking. However, equally dangerous corporate activity happens every day, far from public view.



Corporations have seeped almost invisibly into nearly every government agency and too many congressional offices. And they're as poisonous as carbon monoxide. In the last 20 years, protective legislation and regulation, carefully constructed from the days of President Coolidge and vastly strengthened due to the Depression, have seriously deteriorated.

There's nothing inherently evil, or even bad, about corporations. Indeed, the combination of capital and management under one roof is efficient and essential in a

global, competitive world. So much of our standard of living and our worldwide leadership are directly traceable to our corporate and entrepreneurial culture. But even good things, when they get out of control, turn destructive. Cancer, after all, is just growth gone wild.

There has always been tension between good government

democracy eroded. Their "invisible power" got a grip. The stealthy hunt for corporate profits metastasized from the marketplace and entered the halls of Congress and the executive branch.

The fight over reforming Wall Street is just the latest example. The need for regulation is hardly theoretical here. We're still reel-

to insure they make prudent loans.

So why has the debate on reform dragged on for nearly a year? The public wants Wall Street reined in. So why would any legislator, much less an entire political party, get in the way of financial reform? It can't just be a coincidence that the financial sector happens to be the

rate control of our government. Only real people have the vote; corporations don't.

To regain our democracy, we must:

- Identify and make public those elected representatives who owe their jobs to corporate largesse and cast their votes accordingly.
- Insulate the election process from corporate funding. Bills in both the Senate and House that would forbid campaign spending by contractors who receive more than \$50,000 in taxpayer funds would be a good start.
- Prohibit lawmakers and lobbyists from interacting with each other, except to exchange ideas on legislation, and require them to publish a record of their contacts.

It may take several election cycles to scrub corporate influence and control from our political system, but once it starts it will gain momentum. And once we've accomplished this feat, appropriate regulation and control will follow. The horse will be before the cart, and the driver will be a human person.

John Steel is a lawyer and the former mayor of Telluride, Colo.

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and free enterprise. It hurts the bottom line to scrub emissions from coal-burning power generators, ensure meat is sanitary, clean up toxic waste, and disclose the full risks of financial products.

But once corporations realized that instead of fighting government they could actually buy it through lobbying and political contributions, the base of our

ing from a crisis caused by the absence of it. Congress doesn't even need to reinvent the wheel, a favorite task. There were laws and regulations that had worked for so long, such as those to keep banks and investment brokers separate; require diligent lending; prohibit betting against your own borrowers; require full disclosure to borrowers; and, above all, keep the risk with the lenders

biggest contributor to 2010 congressional campaigns, with more than \$129 million doled out already. Financial firms have also spent well over a half a billion dollars on lobbying since early 2009.

To reverse this situation we must change who gets elected to Congress. And that is the one thing we can do, and perhaps the only thing, to neutralize corpo-

The Struggle is Not Over: Take the time to get tested

BY REV. ROSE WRIGHT-SCOTT

Educating, lifting awareness, and testing for HIV was an important task of local communities last month on National HIV Testing Day.



Some of our churches joined in the plight to continue the fight against this disease, stand with and support those that are infected and affected and to eliminate the continuous stigma that is associated with HIV/AIDS.

I have served as an HIV/AIDS educator for over a decade and I still sit in awe at the ignorance and apathy of many people, especially the African American community and the faith community.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Hu-

man Services, "there are more than 1 million people in the United States living with HIV." One-fourth of them do not know that they are infected with the HIV virus.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that one out of five people living with HIV in the U.S. are unaware of their HIV status. Could you be one of them? The only way to know if you have HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is to get tested. Testing is an opportunity for people to learn their HIV status and to gain knowledge to take control of their health and their lives.

I was recently engaged in a conversation with a beautiful young African American woman that is living with the disease, and she stated the struggle is not

over.

Even though she's been undetectable for several years there are still those, many among her own family members that are just not getting it. They continue the whispers, stares, and asking questions that are hurtful and leave her feeling isolated and alone.

In spite of it all, she's been blessed to have two beautiful daughters that have been tested negative, maintain a job, and is traveling around the country sharing her story, and educating people.

Nevertheless, she says, "there are those that just don't get it, the struggle is not over." She gives credit to God, a strong support system, and groups such as UCAN (United Church of Christ HIV and AIDS Network), Common Thread, AIDS ministries in

the churches and other groups that realize that the struggle is not over.

Take the time to get tested. The life you save could be your

own!

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