

# OPINION

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## Egypt: A Lesson for Our Country

People's interests must come first

BY FRANK KNAPP JR.

Make no mistake about it -- the peaceful Egyptian revolution was brought about by the workers and small business owners of that country protesting together. They want economic opportunity for all and a democratically elected government that puts its peoples' interests above the interests of the financially powerful, well-connected oligarchy.



There is a lesson here for our country.

Our government structures are becoming ever more influenced by those with extremely deep pockets at the expense of our citizens and small businesses. And while we have a tradition of a democratic election process to address needed changes in our government, that process is becoming less and less democratic.

This important issue was the topic of many meetings on my recent trip to Washington, D.C. -- reducing the extraordinary influence of big corporate money in our government. Last year's Citizens United Supreme Court ruling that corporations are "people" that have a Constitutional right to spend unlimited amounts of money to influence elections has moved our country rapidly down the road to a far less democratic nation -- a road we were already on.

Our government "of the people, by the people and for the people" is in jeopardy of becoming "of the corporations, by the corporations

and for the corporations." Real "people" will only be pawns to be manipulated when corporate money totally dominates our elections. Already we've seen how corporate lobbyists dominate the legislative process.

Small businesses are and should be very concerned. We know that big U.S. and multi-national corporations are only interested in profits regardless of the consequence to small businesses.

The fact is that what is good for big business is often not good for small business.

Small businesses must fight for ourselves and not simply rely on

paternalistic big businesses to allow scraps to fall off the bountiful table they have bought for themselves.

Right now in Washington big corporate campaign donors are pushing for even more tax incentives for off-shoring production and jobs -- lost opportunities for small businesses to supply goods and services to domestic manufacturing and fewer workers buying from our local small businesses.

These political donors want to eliminate regulations aimed at protecting us from another financial meltdown causing another great recession -- one that destroys the cus-

tomers base, credit and loans small businesses need to survive.

They also want to cripple any chance for comprehensive national energy and climate legislation -- a significant opportunity for jumpstarting a green economy that will both create new small businesses and offer more opportunities for existing ones.

These and other goals of big corporations, many that now have no allegiance to our country or any country, are likely to be successful not on the merits of the ideas but on the size of the corporate campaign chests.

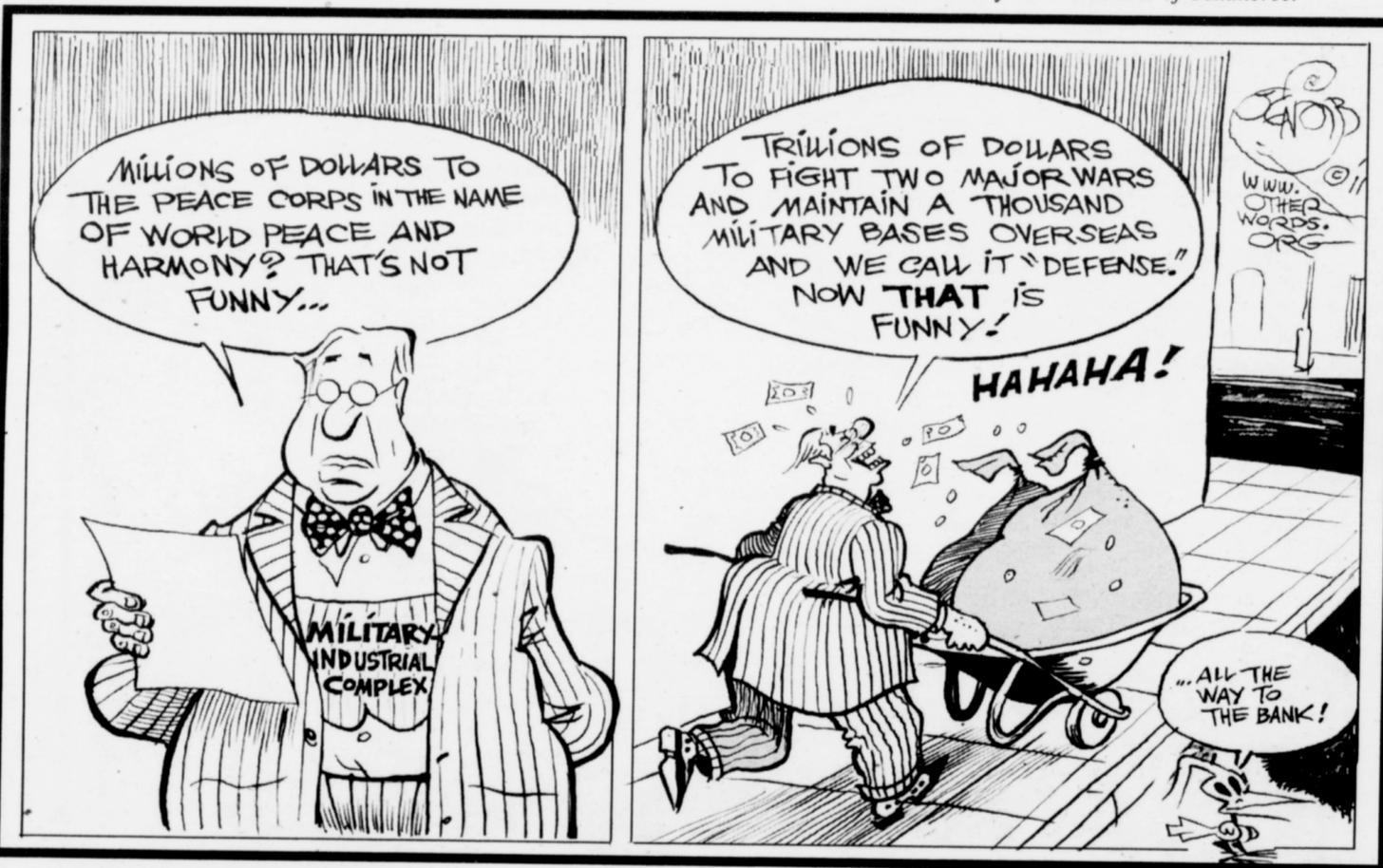
Fortunately, citizens and small businesses across this country are

organizing to take back our democracy from these corporate "persons." We understand that what the Egyptians are demonstrating to get, we are on the verge of losing.

So while our members of Congress publicly express their support for the Egyptian peoples' desire for real democracy, they need to look at the direction our own country is heading and start listening to the concerns of our citizens and small businesses.

Egypt is a warning to the United States.

Frank Knapp Jr. is president and chief executive officer of the South Carolina Small Business Chamber of Commerce.



## Piston Turned Mayor Shoots a 3 Pointer

Dave Bing lays out an economic recovery plan

BY MARC H. MORIAL

A few years ago, many people wondered why a former Detroit Pistons Hall-of-Famer who had built a successful business after he left basketball, would run for mayor of one of the most beleaguered cities in America.

But as he approaches the half-way mark of his first term, Dave Bing has laid out an economic recovery game plan for Detroit that is winning accolades from his constituents and attracting national attention.



Mayor Bing's "Detroit Works" plan is engaging Detroiters from all walks of life to develop strategies for stronger neighborhoods, safer streets and access to jobs.

As part of that plan, the mayor wants to eliminate blight and bolster the city's tax base by enticing Detroit police officers -- more than 50 percent of whom currently live in the suburbs -- to buy renovated abandoned houses in the city which they can purchase for as little as \$1,000.

Fifty years ago, more than 2 million people called the Motor City home. Today that number is around 900,000 and shrinking, largely due to the collapse of the auto industry, an epidemic of housing foreclosures and

the other ravages of the great recession. Over the last several years, unemployment has been as high as 30 percent in some neighborhoods. The jobless crisis has resulted in hundreds of abandoned houses throughout the city.

Facing a budget deficit of \$300 million and the continued decline of once-proud neighborhoods, Mayor Bing has turned to innovation as a solution.

He is practically giving away 200 abandoned homes in the East English Village and Boston-Edison neighborhood to police officers who currently live outside the city. Federal stimulus funds will be used to renovate the homes, many of which are being equipped for maximum en-

ergy efficiency.

In addition to the increased tax revenue, the mayor and many current residents say that the presence of police officers will deter crime and improve relations between the police and citizens.

Mayor Bing is turning Detroit's challenges into opportunities and in the process making the city more competitive to businesses and more livable for residents. We think this is a fantastic idea that could be extended to teachers and firefighters and replicated around the country.

In his state of the city address last year, Mayor Bing said, "We could have listened to those who said our city was a lost cause... We could have continued politics as

usual and promised change but continued down the same path that got us here. But we decided that the old way of doing things was no longer good enough."

We applaud the mayor's commitment and vision.

As President Obama reminded us in his State of the Union address, the only way to bring jobs back to our communities and "win the future" for our children is to out educate, out innovate and out build our global competitors.

Mayor Bing's innovative approach to rebuilding Detroit is putting those words into action.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.