

## FIVE YEARS AFTER *CITIZENS UNITED*: WHERE ARE WE IN CALIFORNIA

On Wednesday, January 21, the fifth anniversary of the widely reviled *Citizens United v FEC* decision, Californians will be gathering in [Los Angeles](#) and [San Francisco](#), Sacramento [and around the country](#) to mourn the death of our democracy.

Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1816, “[T]he end of democracy and the defeat of the American Revolution will occur when government falls into the hands of monied incorporations and lending institutions.” Who could argue that this isn’t exactly what has happened?

In December 2014, Jamie Dimon, chairman of JP Morgan Chase, [personally lobbied members of the US Congress](#), our representatives, with phone calls urging passage of an omnibus spending bill. The bill included a provision unrelated to the budget, written by Citigroup, undoing the “push-out rule” of the Dodd-Frank Financial Reform Act of 2010. Mr. Dimon was successful in no small part because of [the \\$100 million spent by Citigroup](#) on lobbying since 1998 and the \$35 million in campaign contributions over the same time period. When lobbyists and campaign contributions call the shots on Capitol Hill, Congress will gladly break its promise from 2008 to never again allow banks to bet on risky derivatives with government insured deposits, e.g. taxpayers’ money.

In the first few weeks of the new 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, our representatives [are at it again](#), taking aim at the remaining provisions of Dodd-Frank that protect Main Street from Wall Street recklessness. Poll after poll shows that the public remains outraged at the anemic response of government prosecutors in the wake of obvious and widely reported fraud that instigated the 2008 financial crisis. And yet, on a January 14 call with reporters, Jamie Dimon was quoted saying “[B]anks are under assault.” If only.

Closer to home, on December 28, the Los Angeles Times reported that the Los Angeles City Council was backing away from a GMO ban that it had previously supported. The Times noted that “the world’s largest biotechnology trade group hired three top City Hall lobbyists to stop it.” Kathay Feng, executive director of the non-profit governmental watchdog California Common Cause, was quoted in the article saying that this sort of thing “happens on a fairly regular basis.” We know this story well by now.

Also in California, a group of concerned citizens pressured the state legislature to place the voter instruction, Proposition 49, on the 2014 ballot that, if passed, would have instructed the US Congress to draft and pass and the California legislature to ratify an amendment to the US Constitution overturning the *Citizens United* decision.

The Supreme Court of California, responding to a petition from the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association that was summarily dismissed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> District Court of Appeal, ignored the California Constitution [*Article 1, sec. 3 (a)*] and the Court’s own precedent and removed Prop 49 from the ballot in what California Supreme Court Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye called an “extraordinary step... thereby disenfranchising voters.” The California Supreme Court took this “extraordinary step” without a hearing.

A California Supreme Court hearing to decide if Prop 49 will be restored to the 2016 California ballot will happen in the coming months. Money Out, Voters In, Prop 49's sponsoring organization, and Courage Campaign are determined to see that it does. It will be a tremendous blow to the sovereignty of the people if in post *Citizens United* America corporations and wealthy individuals can use their golden bullhorn to sway elections, but the people cannot speak at all.

We must all join in the effort to correct the terrible harms the *Citizens United* decision has wrought before Thomas Jefferson's admonition becomes our bitter reality.

Eddie Kurtz

Executive Director

Courage Campaign  *fights for a more progressive California and country. We are an online community powered by more than 900,000 members.*

7119 West Sunset Boulevard, No. 195

Los Angeles, CA, 90046

Michele Sutter

Co-Founder

Money Out Voters In

328 Vernon Ave.

Venice, CA 90291

310-633-3421