

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

The President's Weekly Address

September 18, 2010

Back in January, in my State of the Union Address, I warned of the danger posed by a Supreme Court ruling called *Citizens United*. This decision overturned decades of law and precedent. It gave the special interests the power to spend without limit and without public disclosure to run ads in order to influence elections.

Now, as an election approaches, it's not just a theory. We can see for ourselves how destructive to our democracy this can become. We've seen it in the flood of deceptive attack ads sponsored by special interests using front groups with misleading names. We don't know who's behind these ads or who's paying for them. Even foreign-controlled corporations seeking to influence our democracy are able to spend freely in order to swing an election toward a candidate they prefer.

We've tried to fix this with a new law, one that would simply require that you say who you are and who's paying for your ad. This way, voters are able to make an informed judgment about a group's motivations. Anyone running these ads would have to stand by their claims. And foreign-controlled corporations would be restricted from spending money to influence elections, just as they were before the Supreme Court opened up this loophole.

This is common sense. In fact, this is the kind of proposal that Democrats and Republicans have agreed on for decades. Yet the Republican leaders in Congress have so far said no. They've blocked this bill from even coming up for a vote in the Senate. It's politics at its worst. But it's not hard to understand why.

Over the past 2 years, we've fought back against the entrenched special interests, weakening their hold on the levers of power in Washington. We've taken a stand against the worst abuses of the financial industry and the health insurance companies. We've rolled back tax breaks for companies that ship jobs overseas. And we've restored enforcement of commonsense rules to protect clean air and clean water. In other words, we've refused to go along with business as usual.

Now the special interests want to take Congress back and return to the days when lobbyists wrote the laws. And a partisan minority in Congress is hoping their defense of these special interests and the status quo will be rewarded with a flood of negative ads against their opponents. It's a power grab, pure and simple. They're hoping they can ride this wave of unchecked influence all the way to victory.

What's clear is that Congress has a responsibility to act. But the truth is, any law will probably come too late to prevent the damage that's already been done this election season. And that's why any time you see an attack ad by one of these shadowy groups, you should ask yourself, who is paying for this ad? Is it the health insurance lobby, the oil industry, the credit card companies?

More than that, you can make sure that the tens of millions of dollars spent on misleading ads don't drown out your voice. Because no matter how many ads they run, no matter how many elections they try to buy, the power to determine the fate of this country doesn't lie in their hands; it lies in yours. It's up to all of us to defend that most basic American principle of a

Government of, by, and for the people. What's at stake is not just an election; it's our democracy itself.

Thanks.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 4:30 p.m. on September 17 in the Library at the White House for broadcast on September 18. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 17, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on September 18. In the address, the President referred to H.R. 5175. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Weekly addresses.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Subjects: Congress : Bipartisanship; Economy, national : Financial regulations, modernization efforts; Elections : 2010 congressional elections; Elections : Campaign finance laws; Employment and unemployment : Outsourcing to foreign countries; Environment : Air quality, improvement efforts; Environment : Water :: Quality; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Legislation, proposed : "Democracy is Strengthened by Casting Light on Spending in Elections (DISCLOSE) Act"; Taxation : Tax Code :: Reform.

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