

## **Granny D responds to Supreme Court ruling on corporate campaign contributions**

January 21, 2010 statement from Doris “Granny D” Haddock in response to the Supreme Court’s decision today to kill campaign finance reform. Ten years ago, I walked from California to Washington, D.C. to help gather support for campaign finance reform. I used the novelty of my age (I was 90), to garner attention to the fact that our democracy, for which so many people have given their lives, is being subverted to the needs of wealthy interests, and that we must do something about it. I talked to thousands of people and gave hundreds of speeches and interviews, and, in every section of the nation, I was deeply moved by how heartsick Americans are by the current state of our politics.

Well, we got some reform bills passed, but things seem worse now than ever. Our good government reform groups are trying to staunch the flow of special-interest money into our political campaigns, but they are mostly whistling in a wind that has become a gale force of corrupting cash. Conditions are so bad that people now assume that nothing useful can pass Congress due to the vote-buying power of powerful financial interests. The health care reform debacle is but the most recent example.

The Supreme Court, representing a radical fringe that does not share the despair of the grand majority of Americans, has today made things considerably worse by undoing the modest reforms I walked for and went to jail for, and that tens of thousands of other Americans fought very hard to see enacted. So now, thanks to this Court, corporations can fund their candidates without limits and they can run mudslinging campaigns against everyone else, right up to and including election day.

The Supreme Court now opens the floodgates to usher in a new tsunami of corporate money into politics. If we are to retain our democracy, we must go a new direction until a more reasonable

Supreme Court is in place. I would propose a one-two punch of the following nature:

A few states have adopted programs where candidates who agree to not accept special-interest donations receive, instead, advertising funds from their state. The programs work, and I would guess that they save their states more money than they cost by reducing corruption. Moving these reforms in the states has been very slow and difficult, but we must keep at it.

But we also need a new approach--something of a roundhouse punch. I would like to propose a flanking move that will help such reforms move faster: We need to dramatically expand the definition of what constitutes an illegal conflict of interest in politics.

If your brother-in-law has a road paving company, it is clear that you, as an elected official, must not vote to give him a contract, as you have a conflict of interest. Do you have any less of an ethical conflict if you are voting for that contract not because he is a brother-in-law, but because he is a major donor to your campaign? Should you ethically vote on health issues if health companies fund a large chunk of your campaign? The success of your campaign, after all, determines your future career and financial condition. You have a conflict.

Let us say, through the enactment of new laws, that a politician can no longer take any action, or arrange any action by another official, if the action, in the opinion of that legislative body's civil service ethics officer, would cause special gain to a major donor of that official's campaign. The details of such a program will be daunting, but we need to figure them out and get them into law.

Remarkably, many better corporations have an ethical review process to prevent their executives from making political contributions to officials who decide issues critical to that corporation. Should corporations have a higher standard than the

United States Congress? And many state governments have tighter standards, too. Should not Congress be the flagship of our ethical standards? Where is the leadership to make this happen this year?

This kind of reform should also be pushed in the 14 states where citizens have full power to place proposed statutes on the ballot and enact them into law. About 70% of voters would go for a ballot measure to “toughen our conflict of interest law,” I estimate. In the scramble that would follow, either free campaign advertising would be required as a condition of every community’s contract with cable providers (long overdue), or else there would be a mad dash for public campaign financing programs on the model of Maine, Arizona, and Connecticut. Maybe both things would happen, which would be good.

I urge the large reform organizations to consider this strategy. They have never listened to me in the past, but they also have not gotten the job done and need to come alive or now get out of the way.

And to the Supreme Court, you force us to defend our democracy--a democracy of people and not corporations--by going in breathtaking new directions. And so we shall.

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