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**Voice of the People**

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**Enron points up need for charter reform**

Following the implosion of the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, U.S. officials wasted little time in freezing the assets of the al-Qaeda terrorist network. Following the financial implosion of the Enron corporation three months later, state officials where Enron does or did business need to immediately seize its assets and distribute them to the victims of this financial violence.

State governments charter corporations in the name of we the people. Enron is chartered in Texas.

Charters once were used as democratic tools to define and control corporations. They were issued one at a time, for a limited purpose and time, and stipulated everything from where directors could live, how much land corporations could own and whether they could own other companies.

In many states, corporations were prohibited from making political campaign contributions. Those that violated their charter had it revoked and their assets seized.

The fear was that without rigid chartering by the state, corporations would become too powerful and end up ruling us instead of we them.

State officials have over time enabled all corporations to overpower the people's right and authority to govern. They now treat business corporations as "corporate citizens" with First, Fourth and 14th Amendment "rights." With lawmakers and judges, they have given corporate managers authority to buy up other corporations and write laws -- all of which is entirely legal.

It is time for such assaults on democracy and self-governance to end.

In the Enron bankruptcy now unfolding, state elected officials must wield the public's authority and clout against giant corporate creditors and their lawyers. If they don't act by yanking its charter and seizing its assets, corporate directors, creditors and their lawyers will use the past 200 years of corporate constitutional manipulations to waltz off with the Enron plunder.

To stop other Fortune 500 corporations from using this history to govern the country, we need to rewrite corporation laws in all 50 states and challenge undemocratic Supreme Court decisions. Such rewrites and challenges should include abolishing corporate "personhood," ending the liability protections of directors and shareholders, chartering corporations for specific periods of time, and preventing business corporations from directly or indirectly contributing to political campaigns.

Such changes would provide protection against future Enron-like debacles, assert the public's right to control the corporate form and expand the people's power to govern themselves.

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