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Campaign bill shouldn't benefit corporations

Greater disclosure of contributors to political campaigns is always a good thing -- whether at the federal, state or local level. Unfortunately, these laudable provisions of the campaign finance-reform bill introduced last summer by Gov. Bob Taft and Secretary of State J. Kenneth Blackwell, Ohio Senate Bill 291, are offset by a buried provision in the bill that would provide a holiday gift to business corporations in this lame-duck legislative session.

SB 291 would legalize, for the first time in nearly 100 years, direct corporate contributions (or investments, depending on how one looks at them) for "electioneering communication" (i.e., ads favoring or opposing political candidates) by so-called issue advocacy groups funded by large business corporations. Two such corporate-funded front groups, Informed Citizens of Ohio and Citizens for a Strong Ohio, invested more than \$3 million in Ohio Supreme Court races this year alone. Corporations are currently not allowed to contribute/invest out of their corporate accounts for ads favoring or opposing political candidates -- until now, if the lame-duck legislature gets its way.

This undemocratic provision needs to be removed or, if not, the entire bill defeated. Increasing the political rights of corporations diminishes our rights as human beings to govern ourselves.

In 1908, the Ohio General Assembly passed a law "to prevent the corruption of elections and political parties by corporations" by barring corporations from directly or indirectly giving money or property to any political organization, party or candidate. To believe that what still passes for democracy in Ohio would be advanced by tossing out this measure and permitting business corporations even more political power is sheer fantasy.

The Ohio Senate's State and Local Government and Veterans Affairs Committee, chaired by Sen. Kevin Coughlin, R-Cuyahoga Falls, a co-sponsor of SB 291, is holding hearings on the bill. Coughlin's predecessors understood clearly that corporate money in politics, be it direct or indirect, led to corruption and a reduction of democracy. Democracy was too precious to allow corporations entry. The question is, will Coughlin and his colleagues come to the same conclusion today?

It must be our role as citizens to publicly unearth this provision and apply pressure for its removal. This holiday season, let's give corporations on this bill a lump of coal that they deserve and give ourselves the gift that lasts as long as it's exercised: democracy.

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