

**Mary Zepernick,  
Cape Cod, MA—  
Program on  
Corporations, Law &  
Democracy**

**Kirsten Lambertsen,  
San Francisco, CA—  
California Center for  
Community Democracy**

**Michael Greenman,  
Columbus, OH—  
Co-Chair, Citizens  
Intent on Reforming  
Corporate  
Accountability**

**Jacqui Brown Miller,  
Olympia, WA—  
Women's International  
League for Peace and  
Freedom**

**Jeff Milchen,  
Bozeman, MT—  
Executive Director,  
ReclaimDemocracy.org**

**Kaitlin Sopoci-Belknap,  
Eureka CA—  
Democracy Unlimited  
of Humboldt County**

**Greg Coleridge,  
Akron, OH—Northeast  
Ohio American Friends  
Service Committee**

May 12, 2005

Joan Blades  
Wes Boyd  
MoveOn.org  
1141 Walnut Street  
Berkeley, CA 94709

Dear Joan Blades and Wes Boyd,

As an informal network of activists from several organizations working to build a democracy movement, we would like to request that MoveOn consider our proposal to work together to begin reframing MoveOn actions around individual and community rights. We believe that we can clearly demonstrate how any issue, whether it's saving a river or stopping a big box store or preventing harmful legislation, is at its heart a rights issue. We also believe that until these "single" issues are all framed in a rights context, meaningful change in the U.S., and the world, is nearly impossible.

#### **OUR PROPOSAL/REQUEST AND WHO WE ARE**

We are contacting MoveOn because you have mobilized millions on behalf of sane, humane and democratic policy-making and have the capacity to help advance the next critical step—building a movement.

Many of us have researched and analyzed democracy in the U.S. for nearly a decade and found that the existence of corporate civil rights is the driving force behind the erosion of individual and community rights, the destruction of our democracy and of our planet. You may be familiar with our work through POCLAD, Reclaim Democracy, and WILPF. In 2003, members of a number of Unitarian Universalist congregations, made abolishing corporate civil rights a priority issue.

With this letter we would like to briefly illuminate why our analysis, and the movement that has sprung from it, is in synch with MoveOn's principles. We then hope that you will agree to meet with us in person to further explore how we propose that MoveOn begin reframing.

Collectively, we've struggled to determine: why, despite valiant efforts by many activists and organizations, are we making so little progress on a wide range of issues? Why do progressives spend the overwhelming majority of resources on struggles where "victory" is merely maintaining the status quo, and defeat means concrete losses?

After nearly ten years of research and analysis, it has become clear to us that single-issue defensive struggles alone will never succeed in protecting citizen health, safety, and welfare unless we develop a common analysis regarding "corporate power over government" versus "citizen power to make decisions through our government."

### **OUR RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS**

Many of us have mined U.S. history and law for insights and answers. We've learned that the U.S. Supreme Court improperly classified corporations as persons under the U.S. Constitution in order to extend to corporations the civil rights that were previously reserved for human beings. As you no doubt know, the wealthy elite now wield their corporate constitutional rights to influence our government and to insist upon laws and regulations that enrich shareholders at the expense of our environment, workers, and human health. When single-issue advocacy groups obtain good laws and regulations, corporations then use their illegitimate rights to shield themselves from those laws and regulations.

It started in 1886, when the Supreme Court transformed the corporation from a subordinate, publicly defined entity, into a person as defined under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. This was the infamous Santa Clara County decision. It opened the door to gaining protections of many of the Bill of Rights for corporations. Ironically, just ten years later, African Americans—for whom the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment was written—lost their personhood rights in the case of Plessy v. Ferguson. And a half-century of legalized segregation was ushered in.

We now know that a multitude of single-issue defensive struggles are connected by the fact that the few, wielding corporate constitutional rights, continue to usurp our promised right of self-governance. Historically, major movements in the U.S. have generally been about rights, about inclusion, about who governs.

### **OUR WORK ON THE GROUND**

Regulation and oversight of corporations does not work. Our earliest activists knew this. The Abolitionists didn't demand a Slave Protection Agency. They drove freedom and rights into the Constitution. Women suffragists didn't ask men to treat them a little better. They drove their rights into the Constitution. Civil rights activists were not content to make Jim Crow and other laws less harsh. They drove civil rights into the Constitution and into state law, and people continue this struggle as these rights are repeatedly expanded and challenged. These movements changed the culture in order to support a legal strategy to change the law.

Such a rights-based movement is evolving today. It has been sparked in, of all places, rural, largely conservative Pennsylvania. For the past six years, a growing number of PA townships have put a rights-based analysis and strategy on the ground, claiming the authority to protect their commons—including their fundamental right of self-governance. With the help of the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund ([www.celdf.org](http://www.celdf.org)), dozens of these townships have banned corporate hog farms and the

spreading of toxic sewage sludge on farmland, and two of them have actually revoked corporate constitutional rights to override local decisions protecting health, safety, family farms, and the natural world. In the process, these actions have created crises of jurisdiction between local and state governments and the courts, providing models for communities elsewhere to assert their self-governing rights.

Communities and counties in California have prohibited further incursions from chain restaurants, the planting of genetically engineered crops, and are exploring ordinances revoking corporate constitutional rights in their local jurisdictions. Local and state organizations have sprung up, based on aspirations to democratic self-governance, and countless groups, coalitions and congregations have immersed themselves in study and subsequent action around corporate versus citizen rule.

### **GROWING THE MOVEMENT WITH MOVEON**

So how do we—today's citizens—take a leaf from our activist forebears and drive the corporate form out of the Constitution in order to make space for our democratic aspirations to flourish? As it was for our ancestors, there are no quick or easy answers. Building a movement takes time, patience, organizing, study, action, and in our view, no organization is better positioned than MoveOn to reach more people and become a defining force in the growing Democracy Movement.

We would like to request MoveOn's collaboration in several areas:

1. Provide a broader visibility to the unifying issue of inappropriate and destructive corporate control of our democratic system and its links to our Constitution, including the Bill of Rights.
2. Publicize the activities of grassroots and national organizations that are working to change corporate control.
3. Provide a letter-writing platform for national and regional rights-based initiatives to make people's voices and wishes heard through an effective e-mailing mechanism.

We believe that your involvement in this issue will be mutually beneficial, as it will demonstrate your commitment to a core change that must take place in order for real progress in many other priority issues to occur.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. We are glad to send more information, talk with you, and meet with you.

Sincerely,

Mary Zepernick, Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy (organization for identification purposes only), [www.poclad.org](http://www.poclad.org)

Michael Greenman, Columbus, OH—Co-Chair, Citizens Intent on Reforming Corporate Accountability (CIRCA, a Columbus, Ohio-based coalition of Unitarian Universalist Congregations from around the country), [www.firstuucolumbus.org/corppers](http://www.firstuucolumbus.org/corppers)

Jeff Milchen, Bozeman, MT—Executive Director, ReclaimDemocracy.org

Jacqui Brown Miller, Olympia, WA—WILPF Challenge Corporate Power/Assert the Peoples Rights leadership team, [www.wilpf.org](http://www.wilpf.org)

Kirsten Lambertsen, San Francisco, CA—California Center for Community Democracy board of directors, [www.cccd.org](http://www.cccd.org)

Kaitlin Sopoci-Belknap, Eureka CA, Democracy Unlimited of Humboldt County, [www.DUHC.org](http://www.DUHC.org)

Greg Coleridge, Akron, OH—Director, Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee, [www.afsc.net](http://www.afsc.net)