

In 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court cracked open Pandora's box with the 5-4 Citizens United ruling that struck down limits on independent political campaign spending by corporations and unions. Last week, they threw the lid wide open and threw away the key to the lock.

On another 5-4 vote, the majority of justices said any limit on aggregate spending by an individual to federal candidates or political parties violates the First Amendment.

Four justices disagreed, saying instead that unlimited spending opens the door for political corruption and the ability to buy elections. I agree.

In the 2012 election cycle, we saw all kinds of political action committee (PAC) money flow into races with the direct goal of swaying those races their way. Without PACs and corporations having to disclose the sources of this money, voters like you and me had no idea who was trying to gain what by throwing money into the election process.

Look at the Senate race in our own state two years ago. With Jon Bruning holding a lead in the final weeks of the campaign over Deb Fischer, all kinds of negatives ads began running in an attempt to discredit Bruning.

Where did this money come from? What were the motives of the donors? How much money was spent to discredit Bruning?

These are all burning questions that remain today but ones you and I will never know the answer to because the Citizens United ruling removed any accountability. Anonymity and the mighty dollar became king while all Joe Q. Citizen could do (and Jon Bruning for that matter) was sit and take it!

Prior to last week's ruling, *McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission*, no person could contribute more than \$48,600 every two years to all federal candidates combined. Nor could they contribute more than \$74,600 to political party committees. As of April 2, all that's out the window.

The ruling did not displace base limits on individual contributions to candidates, currently \$2,600 per candidate, in primary and general elections.

Just how many \$2,600 contributions do you think Joe Q. Citizen can afford to make? On the other side of the ledger, Warren Buffet or Bill Gates could now give all their wealth to a political party with no repercussions nor controls. Does this have the potential to buy elections and influence outcomes? You betcha it does!!!! And it stinks!!!!

Joe Q. has been calling for political campaign spending reform for years. These two rulings have all but doused that hope. And don't count on Congress to go after any further reforms because they're all seeing dollar signs in their eyes, campaign dollar signs that is.

For all practical purposes, you and I have just seen the value of our vote in federal races go up in a puff of smoke. Big money now controls these elections (not that we're naive enough to think they didn't already) and they can do it legally with no accountability to the electorate whatsoever.

If you and I are ever going to retake the political campaign system and restore civility and equality to the election process, it has to be done through an amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

There are two ways to make that happen. Congress can pass a resolution to propose such an amendment. Then, it must be ratified by the legislatures in 38 states. With Congress so money hungry now, I can't ever see such a resolution being passed.

That leaves us with the grassroots effort of getting such a proposal passed in at least 38 states.

Then Congress has no choice but to ratify it.

It seems like a long shot but now's the time for Joe Q., you and I, to decide if we're just going to sit by and let this happen to us or if we can start a movement to do something about it. Without it, our vote at the federal level just became meaningless.