A Call to Americans:
Mobilize and Defy the Court

by Riki Ott

If someone had told me twenty-five years ago I would be working to amend the US Constitution to get America back on track with the vision of our Founders and early Americans—a government of, for, and by the people, I would have asked what they were smoking.

But life happens. I hopped from the Lower 48 to Alaska, and from toxicologist to fisherma'am to community activist when the Exxon Valdez spilled millions of gallons of oil into Prince William Sound.

Along with everyone else in Cordova, my new home, I rallied to defend the Sound. Our way of life, our economy, our very existence as a fishing community was at stake. It was community-level teamwork and it was empowering.

Two of the many helping hands were those of a young single mother, Lisa Marie Jacobs, who switched from helping the emotionally-distraught, to running the local legislative office giving political voice to the town's demands.

While working as a volunteer to drive people's demands into law, I ran into Gershon Cohen at the state Capitol. Gershon, a potter from Haines, had dusted off his academic training in molecular biology to join the citizen storm over the Governor's proposal to slash the state's strong water quality protections.

My work to hold Exxon accountable to the people, Gershon's work to keep industrial polluters from dumping wastes into Alaska's waters, and Lisa Marie's work to empower people to participate in our democracy were all being thwarted by corporate power.

Frustrated that the people's voice was constantly drowned out by corporations obsessed with maximizing profits at the expense of our quality of life and the environment, we formed Ultimate Civics, which Earth Island Institute accepted as a new project. We made it our mission to help coalesce a popular movement to amend the US Constitution to affirm that only human persons are entitled to constitutional rights. We were motivated by outrage over the takeover of America by Big Business and the resulting loss of control over our own lives and our government.

Eight months later, the Supreme Court's decision in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission is a radical undermining of our sovereign self-governance. It ushers in government of, for, and by the Corporations. The ruling leaves ordinary citizens little power to keep corporate influence out of democratic decision-making.

Mind you, Citizens United is merely the last straw in a haystack of successful corporate attempts to extend corporate constitutional "rights" to corporate persons. The

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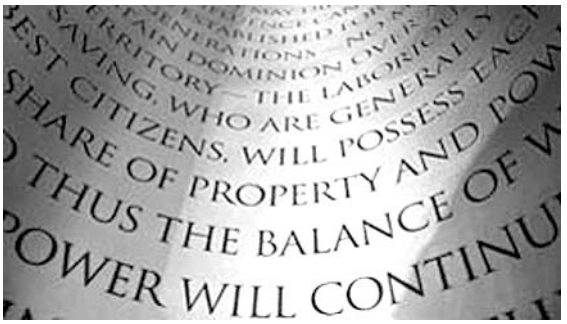

US Supreme Court has been blurring the distinction between "natural persons,"—real living human beings—and "artificial persons"—corporations—since 1886.

But the timing of this decision overlays the eyes of several citizen storms over the economic meltdown and recession, failure to pass health care reform, and the lack of a response to the climate crisis. In this cauldron of chaos lie the seeds of deep fundamental change—the seeds of creating a true democracy and a government of, for, and by the People.

We must lend our hands, talents, and passions to building a grassroots movement to protect democracy from unchecked corporate power. We need to grow the grassroots movement to pass municipal legislation and resolutions that defy the Court and strip corporations of their personhood (human rights) status. We must strike corporate personhood language from State laws.

Action to abolish corporate personhood in municipalities, counties, and states could be the forefront of a movement to push this issue right back to the federal level and force Congress to consider amending the US Constitution to do the same. We must coordinate our individual actions through local groups and national coalitions.

Join the Campaign to Legalize Democracy (CLD). Ultimate Civics and the other organizations in CLD (now 50 groups strong) have formed a diverse coalition in response to Citizens United. CLD aims to amend the US Constitution and end the illegitimate legal doctrines preventing the American people from governing themselves. First and foremost, CLD will move to amend that only human beings are entitled to constitutional rights by tearing out the root of the problem—corporate personhood, which underlies the election financing, and free-speech issues raised in the Citizens United case.

We must unite to reverse this outrageous ruling—and the underlying morally wrong premise that corporations and other artificial persons are entitled to real human rights.

All aboard for democracy!

Riki Ott is director of Ultimate Civics, and a co-organizer of the Campaign to Legalize Democracy. She lectures nationally on the democracy crisis. Learn more and sign the Motion to Amend the Constitution *at www.MoveToAmend.org to affirm rule by the people, not corporations.*