

# Occupy the Courts

## Citizens United Two Years Later

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The Occupy Movement took its campaign against corporate domination to the federal judiciary on Friday, January 20, 2012 storming the US Supreme Court building and demonstrating at 140 other courthouses nationwide to protest the high court's 2010 "Citizens United" decision.

"Corporations are not persons, and money is not political speech!" proclaimed "Occupy the Courts" leader David Cobb in front of several hundred people at a grassy area on US Capitol grounds across the street from the Supreme Court.

Demonstrators, some of them from the Occupy Wall Street encampments in Washington, later moved across the street to the Court, where they pushed through a police barricade and ran up the Court's steps almost to the columns that guard the bronze front doors. Court police allowed the demonstrators to advance, even though federal law prohibits demonstrations on Court grounds. Finally, an hour after the protesters entered onto Court property, police began making arrests and ordering remaining demonstrators down the steps. A Court spokeswoman said a dozen people had been arrested.

The protests marked the two-year anniversary of the Supreme Court's 5-4 decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, which struck down restrictions on independent expenditures by corporations and unions in election campaigns. Critics say the ruling has injected millions of dollars into campaigns, often in the form of attack advertising funded by independent "Super-PACs" that cannot be directly traced or imputed to candidates.

Several leaders of the protest said their coverage of the Super-PACs and their impact on the Republican presidential primaries has helped galvanize opposition. "We are seeing how this disgusting decision is corrupting our system," said Medea Benjamin of Code Pink, a longtime DC activist who helped organize Friday's protests. "And we ain't seen nothing yet. Wait until the races get underway, and this will be influencing congressional races, everything." Asked why she was demonstrating at the Court, she said, "This is the scene of the crime."

Protesters are building on these protests to push for a Constitutional Amendment that would overturn *Citizens United* by stating that money is not speech and corporations are not persons under the law. Asked if a Constitutional Amendment is a realistic goal, Joan Stallard, a demonstrator from DC, said, "The Constitution



AfD Co-chair Nancy Price (right center) sings along with other citizens as part of "The Supremes Song & Dance Troupe" at the Occupy the Courts rally in Washington, DC., one of many protests nationwide organized by Alliance for Democracy chapters and Move To Amend Affiliates. Read *Move To Amend's proposed 28th Amendment to the Constitution* at <http://movetoamend.org/amendment> photo: TED

has been amended 27 times, and we can do it again." She said more and more of the public is beginning to understand "the power of corporations in our political system" and will be receptive to a Constitutional change.

In Boston, protests included speeches and music by a fife and drum team dressed in Revolutionary-era clothing. An "auctioneer" dressed in top hat and tails sold rights such as free speech and freedom of the press to the highest bidders, who were corporations represented by people dressed in boxes with the names of companies. About 150 people braved 29-degree weather to participate in the Boston protest behind the John J. Moakley US Courthouse. One woman pushed a toddler in a stroller with a sign attached that said, "no corporation ever gave me a hug."

Roughly 100 people chanted slogans outside the US Court of Appeals in San Francisco. And in West Palm Beach, approximately 40 people protested at the federal courthouse, with one stating, "I don't want corporations to buy the presidency." Demonstrators also gathered in Portland, Oregon and Detroit. In Chicago, 50 demonstrators came out in driving snow, with one holding a sign that said, "Citizens United against Citizens United."

In New York City, where the "Occupy" protests began, demonstrators moved the location of their anti-court protest to Foley Square, after a federal judge on Thursday nixed their preferred location outside the Daniel Patrick Moynihan courthouse.

*This is an excerpt from the Blog of the Legal Times: Law and Lobbying in the Nation's Capital.*

**"This is the scene of the crime."**

Medea Benjamin



AfD Vice Co-chair Ruth Caplan occupying the Supreme Court on January 20, 2012 photo: TED