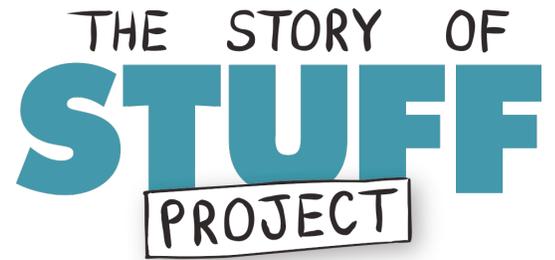

THE STORY OF CITIZENS UNITED v. FEC

FAQs



What's wrong with profit?

Our point isn't that there's something inherently wrong with making a buck. (Though there is a difference between making a living and making a killing.) We are saying that due to law, markets, and structure, corporations are single-minded in pursuit of profit above other concerns.

They are structurally unable to take other things fully into account—like the environment or the welfare of workers and communities—which is both why we all benefit from government exerting controls on corporations on societies' behalf, and why corporations should not be given the same rights to influence elections as people. Regardless of what you think about corporations' conduct in the market, they just don't belong in our democracy.

What kind of rules?

Governments set rules about everything from safe working conditions and fair wages to pollution levels and product safety. And there's a reason for that: while it would be wonderful if corporations just did the right thing all the time, they don't. Even with regulations in place, it is widely believed that BP took unacceptable safety risks on its deepwater drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico. Would we better off letting corporations police themselves? Clearly not.

A big reason we have a government is to solve problems that are too big for us to solve as individuals or too important to leave to the market. Keeping corporations in check is one of those jobs.

Citizens United? Who's that?

Citizens United, the group that brought the case, favors limited government, free enterprise, and national sovereignty, according to its website. It makes movies—including the film about Hillary Clinton originally at the heart of the case—starring conservative luminaries like Newt Gingrich and Sarah Palin. At a February event, the group gave its lifetime achievement award to Phyllis Schlafly. It was presented to her by U.S. Representative Michelle Bachman of Minnesota.

Corporations are “people”?

Remember, corporations are just legal entities, created by and subject to our laws. Yet, since the late 1800s, big business has been fighting for greater corporate rights, audaciously claiming many of the constitutional rights granted to real people, even though the word “corporation” never appears in the Constitution or the Bill of Rights.

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“Independent groups?” What's that mean?

Few corporations are interested in taking out advertisements to support or oppose candidates on their own. (Huh, wonder why?) Rather, they funnel their money through independent groups organized under various provisions of the tax code. Some of these groups disclose their funders, others don't, so it's often hard to track the sources of support for specific candidates. About half of the money that flowed to such independent organizations in the 2010 elections went into groups that kept their donors secret, including the Chamber of Commerce, which spent over \$30 million in 2010 alone.

How do we amend the Constitution again?

There are a few ways to do it. An amendment has to be proposed either by a 2/3 vote of both houses of Congress, or else by a constitutional convention convened when the legislatures of 2/3 of the states so request. The amendment has to be ratified either by the legislatures of 3/4 of the states, or by conventions in 3/4 of the states, depending on which means of ratification Congress proposes.

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