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Protecting Democracy from the Dollar

Democracy is the foundation the United States was built on over 230 years ago. It remains the most important institution in America. Terrorists and rogue authoritarian regimes constantly threaten democracy but little attention is given to the menacing domestic threats that could destroy modern democracy.

Income inequality an underlying problem America must address in order to continue thriving as a nation. According to a report by the Congressional Budget Office, between 1979 and 2007 the average after-tax household income for the top one percent of the U.S. population with the highest income grew by 275 percent. The middle class grew at a more sluggish rate; 60 percent of the population in the middle of the income scale averaged after-tax household income growth of 37 percent from 1979 to 2007. The average after-tax household income in the lowest 20 percent was up by only 18 percent during the same time period.

This alarming disparity has grim repercussions on politics in America. Political gridlock increases dramatically in countries with large differences in income equality. This is apparent as the U.S. becomes more polarized and partisan over issues that were not previously a major concern, such as the U.S. debt ceiling. Growth slows when politicians cannot agree on solutions for urgent matters because of party lines.

If left unchecked, income inequality will continue to generate a wider income gap as the wealthy become wealthier and use their money to influence politicians in a way that will benefit their own interests over the interests of the public. Corporations already wield powerful influence over representatives and this problem is compounded by the 2010 Supreme Court ruling in *Citizens United V. FEC* and subsequent ruling made in *Speechnow.org V. FEC* by the U.S. Court of Appeals. The five-to-four decision in *Citizens United V. FEC* lifted the ban on corporations and other organizations from engaging in independent expenditures, allowing infinite amounts of money to be spent on political ads by these organizations. The *Speechnow.org V. FEC* decision determined that donations to Political Action Committees that only have independent expenditures cannot be limited, allowing groups to donate any amount to a campaign. Donors only have to be revealed once per quarter by "Super" PACs, making the election process even less transparent. These decisions mark a momentous and dangerous change in the way political campaigns are financed. Money should not be the deciding factor in an election, but unlimited donations are now ingrained into U.S. political campaigns by the recent court rulings. This will only lead to the wealthy exerting more influence over public officials to further their own interests.

In order to keep democracy from being perverted or destroyed, the U.S. government must take steps to ensure the wealthy do not receive preferential treatment or have more

influence than common citizens. If action isn't taken, the voices of corporations and the wealthy will drown out the voices of the citizens, effectively shattering democracy, the most essential principal of the United States of America.

Works Cited

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