

2013 — 02 Corporate Personhood and the Environment

The primary mission of the Izaak Walton League of America is to conserve, maintain, protect, and restore the soil, water, forest, wildlife, and other natural resources. A major threat to carrying out this mission is climate change. The driving force behind climate change is global warming which by nearly unanimous scientific consensus is occurring at an ever increasing rate and is largely caused by human burning of fossil fuels. Climate change affects nearly everything including the massive epidemic of species extinctions, and the contamination of fresh water aquifers with salt water as sea levels rise.

Congress has been unwilling to seriously address the climate change issue. And the reason for this lack of action is largely due to the massive effort by the fossil fuel industry to elect officials sympathetic to their cause, and to lobby those in office to prevent regulation and to provide subsidies to their industry. The fossil fuel industry has vast sums of money for this work and completely overwhelms environmental groups like the Izaak Walton League.

In 2010 the US Supreme Court (Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission) tilted the playing field even more toward large, rich corporate interests by ruling that corporations can spend unlimited amounts of money for or against candidates for political office. This ruling partially overturns the McCain-Feingold Campaign Finance Law (and dozens of other similar laws around the country) which attempted to put limits on money for campaigns, and to bring accountability to elections and lobbying. Five Supreme Court Justices have overturned years of precedent, and many current laws passed by the people's Representatives in Congress. The voice of "we the people" is being drowned out by corporate interests and Congress now largely represents those corporate interests.

The only reason the Supreme Court can make this ruling is their claim that corporations are "persons" and so therefore have the same constitutional rights as real human beings. The court says corporations have free speech rights and also that money is speech so our elected Representatives can pass no laws to regulate money for elections or lobbying. For the first years of the US Republic corporations were not considered "persons" with Constitutional rights, and so many of the courts recent decisions overturning long precedent is quite a victory for corporate power and a loss for citizens.

Therefore, be it resolved that the Minnesota Division, Izaak Walton league of America in convention, April 28, 2013 supports an amendment to the US Constitution to abolish corporate personhood, and to state clearly that the rights guaranteed in the Constitution apply to human persons and not to corporations, and that money is not speech and can therefore be regulated.

Submitted By:

Grand Rapids Wes Libbey Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America

David Alban President