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“Monk” TV Actor Tony Shalhoub Blasts Citizens United Ruling

The [2010 Citizens United](#) decision, a landmark U.S. Supreme Court case that prohibited the government from regulating political expenditures by unions and corporations, is a “slippery slope” and a plague in American politics, says Tony Shalhoub, star of the television series *Monk*. The decision has been blasted by activist groups and Democrats in Congress, while President Obama supports a constitutional amendment to reverse the ruling.



In its 2010 decision, the court stated that permitting the government to limit the number of dollars industry groups and other independent organizations can contribute violates the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The ruling also curbed federal limits on when organizations could employ election-related efforts, such as producing political materials or running radio or TV ads.

“I think there’s so much money in politics now,” Shalhoub [said](#) at the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina. “We need to begin to dial that back. The First Amendment, you know, it’s a bit of a slippery slope because it really becomes more about dollars than about the First Amendment itself.”

The popular actor affirmed that he opposes the Supreme Court’s view that spending on political campaigns is safeguarded by free-speech rights. “There shouldn’t be a limit on speech, but there should be a limit on the money that is spent because in the end it just becomes the guy, ultimately will become the guy with the most money and the most backing wins,” Shalhoub asserted. “It’s dollars over the actual voice of the people.”

Echoing Shalhoub’s staunch opposition to *Citizens United*, the Democratic Party’s official statement on the issue of campaign finance laws reads as follows:

Our opponents have applauded the Supreme Court’s decision in *Citizens United* and welcomed the new flow of special interest money with open arms. In stark contrast, we believe we must take immediate action to curb the influence of lobbyists and special interests on our political institutions. President Obama signed an executive order to establish unprecedented ethics rules so that those who leave the executive branch may not lobby this administration and officials may not accept gifts from lobbyists. We support campaign finance reform, by constitutional amendment if necessary. We support legislation to close loopholes and require greater disclosure of campaign spending.

Constitutionalists have pointed out, however, that the Emmy award-winning actor’s interpretation of the [First Amendment](#) is askew, as the constitutional amendment states:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.



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Regarding the matter at hand, restricting donations to political campaigns directly violates the Constitution, as it abridges freedom of speech — the very power the First Amendment sought to protect. While contributing money to a politician may not be considered speech in its literal meaning, giving one’s own money to a particular candidate is absolutely a *form* of speech. Moreover, supporting (financially, verbally, or in any other form) a public servant that opposes certain government actions could be considered a petition against the government, another effort the First Amendment sought to preserve.

Indeed, such speech is abridged through campaign finance laws, as was the case with the [McCain-Feingold Campaign Finance Act of 2002](#), which revamped legal limits on political spending set in 1974 while barring unregulated campaign contributions to political parties. Such measures intend to “reform” the intimate ties between money and politics. But, in fact, they infringe on freedom of speech by capping the amount of money an individual may contribute to a campaign, which in turn impedes on an individual’s freedom to express their political views.

Regardless of the constitutional implications of *Citizens United*, opponents of the Supreme Court’s decision have rallied behind the Democrats’ plea to limit political contributions from corporations and other organizations. “Since the Supreme Court handed down its *Citizens United* decision, Americans across the political spectrum have called for decisive action to limit the influence of money in our elections,” [says](#) Michael Keegan, president of the leftist advocacy group People for the American Way.

In effect, Democrats and progressive groups claim to limit the influence of money in politics. However, limiting the influence of money in politics *can* be achieved without violating the Constitution — by curbing the size and scope of government. Eliminating arbitrary subsidies and regulations will naturally suppress the craving for corporations and other independent organizations to lobby the government for special kickbacks.

With the exception of those groups that may seek to protest corrupt or destructive government actions, the amount of money now flowing throughout the political system will naturally diminish. Liberty-minded Congressman Ron Paul (R-Texas) laid out such reasoning in a [February 2002 article](#):

Special interest money has a huge influence in Washington, and it has a tremendous effect on both foreign and domestic policy. Yet we ought to be asking ourselves why corporations and interest groups are willing to give politicians millions of dollars in the first place. Obviously their motives are not altruistic. Simply put, they do it because the stakes are so high. They know government controls virtually every aspect of our economy and our lives, and that they must influence government to protect their interests. Our federal government, which was intended to operate as a very limited constitutional republic, has instead become a virtually socialist leviathan that redistributes trillions of dollars.

Indeed, Paul explains why campaign finance laws trample on the Constitution, while asserting that Congress has no authority to regulate political campaigns. “We can hardly be surprised when countless special interests fight for the money,” Rep. Paul concluded in his article. “The only true solution to the campaign money problem is a return to a proper constitutional government that does not control the economy. Big government and big campaign money go hand-in-hand.”

Photo of actor Tony Shalhoub: AP Images



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