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Public Funding
Common Cause

Thank you very much.

The long range weather forecast is out. In the coming years, we are in for great hurricanes, droughts, floods and rapidly rising sea levels that will erode our coastlines. Further, the earth's sixth major extinction of species is underway. As my friend Bill McKibben said when we were arrested in the Capitol Rotunda, this is not an act of God, but an act of Congress.

Indeed, what happens in the Congress of the most powerful nation on earth profoundly affects the environment of our planet.

But, is Congress in the hands of ~~the~~ we the people, so that we can protect the sustainability of our world? It is not, as we well know.

Our struggle for control is like wrestling with an armed man: we had better win. That villain is,

of course, corporate involvement in our politics.

Let me share my favorite quote from Teddy Roosevelt. He said this in Kansas on Aug. 31, 1910, the year I was born:

"Our government, national and state, must be freed from the sinister influence or control of special interests. Exactly as the special interests of cotton and slavery threatened our political integrity before the Civil War, so now the great special business interests too often control and corrupt the men and methods of government for their own profit. We must drive the special interests out of politics. That is one of our tasks today...The citizens of the United States must effectively control the mighty commercial forces which they have themselves called into being. There can be no effective control of corporations while their political activity remains. To put an end to it will be neither a short nor an easy task, but it can be done."

Mr. Roosevelt was right. The only thing that has

changed since he spoke is that the stakes are now much higher.

What do we, as reform-minded citizens, propose to do ~~about~~ it? What is our winning strategy for getting corporations out of our politics?

Certainly, the public financing of elections, as has been won in Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts and Arizona, offer important ways to outflank corporate influence. Does the reform community have an integrated plan to achieve similar reforms in the remaining states and in Congress? I think we need one, and we all need to see it so we can decide where we can each help best.

Are we documenting the present system of bribery in a way that the U.S. Attorney General and her counterparts in the states will be forced to make arrests? I have seen little action on this front. *in the media*

Perhaps we can round up former employees from the big companies -- people who have been

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in the room when it was decided that money must be given to candidates and officials to assure their votes. That is criminal evidence and we should make a project of it. The federal bribery statute is clear enough. It says:

“Whoever directly or indirectly, corruptly gives, offers or promises anything of value to any public official... to influence any official act... shall be fined... not more than three times the monetary equivalent of the thing of value... or imprisoned for not more than fifteen years, or both...”

The NAACP took as its mission the enforcement of the Civil Rights Act. The National Organization for Women took ~~took~~ as its mission the enforcement of equal opportunity laws. Who, if not Common Cause, will take up this clear and lovely bribery statute and see that it is enforced?

I ask myself if you are
~~If we~~ spend all our time trying to get doomed bills through a corrupt Congress, are we really

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seeking success, or just self-perpetuation?

Finally, are we putting our bodies in the way of an unjust system, in the way that King's followers did in the segregated American South? Certainly, the Civil Rights Movement would have not gotten very far if King^{had} restricted his actions to the release of reports about the harmful effects and unfairness of segregation.

~~Documenting the truth is important, but it is only useful as the justification for action. If ~~you~~^{we} do nothing but document the problem and cry about it, ~~you~~^{we} only serve to lower people's expectations of government, which damages the cause of reform.~~

In his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Rev. King wrote this:

...You may well ask: "Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to

create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent-resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word "tension." I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. ... The purpose of our direct-action program is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. ...

Well, we may say that direct action made sense in the Civil Rights movement, because the crime was clear and the cause was urgent. ~~Well~~, how is that different than now, when we are faced with a system of corruption so perverse that our whole planet is going to feathers? Do we have enough raw, street courage to be in this business at this time, with so much at stake? I think it is a question we must each ask of ourselves, because

It is not much of an exaggeration to say that the condition of the world is in ^{your} (the hands) of common cause and its people.)

But today is a day to remember the past. I remember coming to meet Claudia and ^{Andy} some ~~others~~ before my walk, when I think they were trying to be careful not to encourage an old woman to walk to her doom. In the end Common Cause promised me that they would notify their members in the states along my walk, so that they might help me. ^{They} You did that, and I am very, very thankful to ^{CC} you and to the supporters who responded. I would not be here today; my trek an accomplished fact, if it had not been for that action on the part of Common Cause.

Friends from ^{U.H.} Mike Polunbo Ken Herber
Jason Rhodes Sec of State of W Va
Jim Studdock

I am most grateful to those Common Cause staff people and volunteers who walked with me: Claudia, Matt, ^{Keller} Hunter, Dennis & John. It was, and it continues to be, a great pleasure to work with them, and I think we have together done some good in moving campaign finance reform into ^a higher public profile. I think we helped give John McCain and Bill Bradley some confidence that the people will respond emotionally to this issue, when it is presented correctly and in the historical context of the century-old progressive movement.

There is no question now that campaign reform will roll through the first decades of this new century with victory after victory, mostly in the states, and that the Public Finance law [Common Cause helped push through the congress in 1974] will become a reality.

~~to [People associated with Common Cause have been central that fact, and I especially think that Matt Keller and Claudia Malloy have made a real contribution to my effort and to this larger historical development, and Scott Harshberger has quickly become the voice of America's conscience on campaign reform.]~~

~~[On the road, John Anthony and Dennis Burke made great contributions in defining and delivering the message of reform to hundreds of communities and to the local and national press, radio and TV. From the moment I started in Pasadena California on January 1, 1998, John Anthony was using his expertise to contact all of his many sources throughout the media world, working to make me known.]~~

~~[If Dennis Burke had not appeared with a borrowed van at the border of California and Arizona to support me in the Mohave Dessert, my whitened, bleached bones~~

would probably be stretched out somewhere in that desolation even as we speak. *Furthermore Dennis and his partner Maurice nursed me back to health & gave me encouragement to continue my trek after a hospital stay for dehydration.*
And Clauddia Malloy, for the first time in history, ~~that I know of~~, got the leaders of eight different organizations to sit down and plan that glorious entry into Washington for me. She and Matt Keller gave it their all and I thank them for it.

America thirsts for true reform and they look to *you* [Common Cause] for succor. [They believe in Common Cause, they respect and trust you. They are sure you are the answer to enacting laws for Campaign Finance Reform.]

[Thank you very much for this honor today. I look forward to many fine arguments and adventures with you all in the future.] I hope that we can celebrate public funding of elections in all fifty states and in Congress, and a full prohibition of corporate money in politics, all by my 100th birthday.

Thank you very much.