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Common Cause DC

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 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 who kills for a living: we had better win, and we had better finish him off when we do. That villain is, of course, corporate involvement in our politics.

Let me share my favorite quote from Teddy

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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 <sup>the Reformers</sup> propose to do about it? What is our winning strategy for getting

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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. Do we have an integrated plan to achieve similar reforms in the remaining states and in Congress? I would like to see <sup>such a</sup> ~~the~~ plan, and find a page of it where I might try to help.

Are we documenting the present system of bribery in a way that we can soon demand 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.] If all ~~we are~~ <sup>I want</sup> doing ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> trying to get doomed bills through a corrupt Congress, <sup>was the whole world</sup> ~~do we really want~~ <sup>expect</sup> success? [Does success scare us, because we need ongoing problems in order to justify our existence?]

<sup>And Reformers</sup> 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 restricted his actions to the release



~~of report cards and 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~~<sup>we</sup> do nothing but document the problem and cry about it, ~~you~~<sup>we</sup> only serve to lower people's expectations of government, which damages the cause of reform.

~~Now~~<sup>to</sup>, I got in some trouble with some of you when I made a speech in Boston suggesting that reform battles are fought in the states, and that Washington is only useful as a place where the peace agreements are signed.

I will not belabor that point today. Today is a day to remember. I remember coming to meet some of you before my walk, when I think you were trying to be careful not to encourage an old woman to walk to her doom. You promised me that you would notify your members in the states along my walk, so that they might help me. You did that, and I am very thankful to you and to the supporters who responded.

I won't say so!

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Too crybaby! They deserve it but

[Those supporters, I know, gave the national office a hard time, because they saw the needs and opportunities of my trek at first hand, and thought that Common Cause might lend some material support. I understand, I think, why that never happened. I was told that, if Congress thought I was being helped by Common Cause too much, that I would not be taken as a true representative of the people. Well, that rather <sup>said to me</sup> ~~says that~~ Common Cause does not consider itself a representative of the people anymore, which is a shame if anyone here still thinks that. I tell you that you do represent the people, and you need not fear supporting people who make extraordinary efforts to push for reforms. If someone wants to sit in a dying tree to make a point about political corruption, please send them up a little birdseed from time to time.]

I am grateful to those Common Cause staff people and volunteers who walked with me and who helped get <sup>the</sup> ~~my~~ message out. 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 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.

People associated with this organization have been central to 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 <sup>Farrah</sup> has quickly become the voice of America's conscience on campaign reform.

On the road, John Anthony and Dennis Burke <sup>also</sup> made great contributions in defining and delivering the message of



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(7) and I know I would not be here today with my journey successfully ended had it not been for Common Cause & its members  
reform to hundreds of communities and to the national press. (If you weren't out there, you have no idea how wonderful it has been, and how deeply Americans thirst for true reform.

They look to you. To Common Cause! They expect you to change things don't let them down  
Thank you very much for this honor, and 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. So we had better get cracking.

Thank you very much.