US SIF
The Forum for Sustainable and Responsible Investment

Letter to the Editor
The Washington Post
Via email to letters@washpost.com

May 22, 2012

We appreciate the attention given to corporate political spending and the work by shareholders to increase transparency by companies (Tom Hamburger and Brady Dennis "More shareholders call on companies to disclose their political spending," May 21, 2012). Indeed, the number of shareholder proposals requesting corporate political transparency has been growing steadily and more than 100 major companies already publicly disclose their political spending policies and payments, including Microsoft, Wells Fargo, Merck, Aetna, and more than half of the S&P 100. However the concern about this issue extends well beyond what is occurring at company annual meetings and in company boardrooms. In 2011, US SIF, the membership forum for sustainable and responsible investment, joined with investors managing over $690 billion in assets, in asking the SEC to act on a petition requesting rulemaking on corporate political spending transparency.

More recently, the SEC received a record-breaking 286,000 comments requesting action on political spending disclosure from a wide range of Americans, including investors. In the Citizens United decision, the Supreme Court said that full, real-time disclosure of corporate political payments allows shareholders to “determine whether their corporation’s political speech advances the corporation’s interest in making profits.”

While this disclosure is not sufficient to address the havoc wrought by the decision in Citizens United, it is nonetheless a critically needed risk management tool for shareholders, corporate management, and directors.

Lisa Woll
CEO
US SIF: The Forum for Sustainable and Responsible Investment
Washington, DC