



Campaign finance ruling stirs debate

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(Altoona) -- Another important campaign finance decision handed down Wednesday by the U.S. Supreme Court is provoking both celebration and consternation across the country.

The 5-to-4 ruling in *McCutcheon v. the Federal Election Commission* means instead of a total of \$123,000, a single donor who gives to all Congressional candidates and one-third of Senate candidates in an election cycle can give as much as \$3.5 million.

Clare Smith-Larson, a retiree from Altoona, Iowa, worries that those contributions will drown out voices of voters like hers.

"And it's been made very clear by a number of our senators that when you do campaign finance soliciting for donations, that the person who rises to the top of the list is the person who gives the most money," she points out.

Smith-Larson helped to organize a protest Wednesday at the state capitol in Des Moines, one of 140 held in 38 states and the nation's capital.

The Cato Institute and the other groups applauded the ruling, which says restricting the total amount a donor can give violates the donor's First Amendment rights and doesn't prevent corruption.

But Paul Ryan, senior counsel with the Campaign Legal Center, says the *McCutcheon* ruling, combined with the *Citizens United* ruling of 2010, opens the floodgates wider to give the wealthy more influence over politicians.

However, he does see a small silver lining.

"The court did in fact leave the door open for more narrowly tailored corruption-preventing policies that Congress might pass, and that state legislatures and city councils across the country could certainly pursue," he explains.

Marge Baker, executive vice president of People for the American Way, says the McCutcheon decision, which she sees as a major threat to democracy, is bound to generate a wide range of responses.

"From amending the Constitution to small-donor public financing proposals," she points out.

Other critics of the decision say the Court is ignoring previous laws passed by Congress, past presidents' decisions to sign those laws, and even the Court's own precedents.