

Roemer: Corrupt system compromises lawmakers

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WASHINGTON — Former Louisiana Gov. Buddy Roemer urged lawmakers Tuesday to overhaul a campaign [finance](#) system that he said essentially allows wealthy donors to buy lawmakers.

Congress is not just broken, the former presidential candidate told members of a Senate subcommittee.

"It is bought, rented, leased, owned by the money-givers," he said. "This is not about one party ... it is about systemic and institutional corruption where the size of your check rather than the strength of your need or idea determine your place in line."

Roemer made his remarks at a hearing held by the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights on the rise of corporate spending on political campaigns and a Democratic proposal that would let states ban the practice.

The hearing comes a month after the Supreme Court threw out a Montana law barring corporations from spending [money](#) on political campaigns.

The court ruled that its 2010 decision in Citizens United vs. Federal Election [Commission](#) applies to state campaign finance laws. The 2010 ruling cleared the way for companies and unions to spend unlimited amounts of money to advocate for candidates and issues.

Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., has introduced a bill that would amend the Constitution to restore Congress' authority to regulate corporate political

expenditures. He said his legislation would "right the wrong" of the Supreme Court's ruling.

"The solution here is a constitutional amendment ... (to put power in) the hands of the people and not the corporations," Baucus told the subcommittee. "It's clear that action is needed to restore Americans' faith in our political and electoral process."

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., chairman of the Judiciary Committee, called the Citizens United ruling "a harmful decision that needs to be fixed."

But Ilya Shapiro, a senior fellow at the CATO Institute, a libertarian-leaning think tank based in Washington, told subcommittee members the ruling is "misunderstood."

He said the way to improve the system is to stop limiting political donations by individuals and to require disclosure of people donating large amounts.

"We now have a system that's unbalanced, unstable and unworkable, and we haven't seen the last of campaign finance cases before the Supreme Court or attempts at legislative reforms," he said.

Roemer, who suspended his bid for president in May, made campaign reform his signature issue. He vowed not to accept donations from political action committees or super PACs, and he limited individual donations to \$100.

That strategy made it difficult for Roemer to bring in enough money to deliver his message. He said he raised about \$750,000 for his presidential campaign — far from the millions raised by other candidates.

But Roemer said he won several elections as a congressman without taking money from political action committees.

"There are two races that you run," he said. "The race for money and then the race for votes."

Roemer also wasn't invited to participate in any of the GOP presidential debates.

His 17-month campaign, included stops in Washington, where he criticized lawmakers for taking corporate money.

He focused heavily on New Hampshire, hoping to get a boost from the state's early GOP primary. He later unsuccessfully sought the nominations of the Reform Party and Americans Elect, an online third-party group.

Roemer was elected governor as a Democrat and served from March 1988 to January 1992. He switched to the Republican party in 1991. He represented Louisiana in the House as a conservative Democrat from 1981 to 1988, and is a former CEO of Business First [Bank](#) in Baton Rouge.

Roemer is continuing to push to change campaign finance laws as chairman of The Reform Project, a new group focusing on campaign finance reform.

Republicans and Democrats "are addicted to the special-interest money," Roemer said.

He wants full disclosure of all political contributions, a ban on contributions from registered lobbyists and a limit on PAC contributions. He also wants to require retiring lawmakers to wait at least five years before they begin working as lobbyists.

"Sunlight is a powerful disinfectant," Roemer said of disclosure.