Corrupting corporate and big donor money is pouring into all levels of our government at unprecedented levels. The right to vote is being assaulted across the nation. Gridlock and obstruction have crippled Washington. Shadowy special interests are launching attacks in state legislatures across the country. Americans’ ability to participate in our democracy and weigh in on important decisions that affect our lives is being diminished as the fundamental principal of “one person, one vote” is being deliberately and systematically undermined. There’s no question—our democracy is in trouble.

We didn’t get here by accident—this crisis is the result of a systematic attack by a handful of millionaires, billionaires, and corporations who profit and benefit when our democracy is not functioning.

**WHY SIERRA CLUB IS DOING THIS WORK**

In 2010, a landmark ruling by the Supreme Court in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission opened the floodgates to allow individuals and corporations the ability to spend limitless amounts of corrupt outside money to influence elections. As a result, outside spending by big polluters spiked by more than 11,000 percent between 2008 and 2012. Simultaneously, Americans’ access to the ballot box has been under attack. Shadowy organizations like the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) are pushing state laws that suppress the vote across the country and attack clean energy development. And, this past summer, the Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act, shredding legislation that safeguarded the right to vote for Americans who have faced the sharpest edge of discrimination.

Why? Because our votes are our voices—and if those who care about protecting the health of our families and our planet are kept from the polls or have our voices drowned out by big polluter cash, it’ll make it impossible to win on the issues we care about—and it’ll make it easier for our opponents to have their way.

The current session of the House of Representatives has been recognized as the most anti-environmental in history, having taken over 500 votes on anti-environmental issues. In the Senate, allies of big polluters have filibusted an unprecedented 400 times in the past six years and continue to delay executive nominees and judges.

What does that mean for the Sierra Club? It means that key legislation meant to protect our access to basic resources and necessities like clean air, clean water, and safe communities has been derailed. It means courts and
federal agencies that make critical clean air decisions are shorthanded.

All of these threats—excessive money in politics, attacks on voting rights, and gridlock in Washington—have one thing in common: they are largely funded—and ultimately benefit—the same small handful of dirty fuels billionaires. The Koch brothers, Art Pope, and Shaun McCutcheon have billions more to gain if they silence the environmental community. That’s why they are doing whatever they can to keep the people who disagree with them out of office, away from the polls, and out of the courts.

Protecting our environment and protecting our democracy go hand in hand. In order to fight the influence of big polluter money, we know we have to push back at the root of the problem—and we can’t do this alone. That’s why we are building a movement that fights to restore our government and our democracy to one that is, by and for the people.

BUILDING A PEOPLE POWERED MOVEMENT
To be successful in the long run, we need a public that is not willing to accept business as usual and that believes the solutions are viable and achievable. We also have to fight for sizable reforms. In order to make our political system truly accessible to all Americans, the Citizens United and McCutcheon v. FEC rulings will need to be countered, and we must reinforce and strengthen the right of each citizen to register and vote. Sierra Club is joining forces with Communications Workers of America, NAACP, Greenpeace and almost 50 national issue-based organizations to build the power necessary to develop a multi-year effort and broad movement over the next decade.

SIERRA CLUB ADDING VALUE TO THE FIGHT
Through education and organizing, we’ve made the link explicit: the erosion of our democracy has a direct negative effect on our ability to achieve progress on our environmental ideals. And the attacks on our ideals are a potent example of the problem facing our democracy and the values that are at stake in our fight.

WHAT YOU CAN DO
1. Join the Sierra Club Democracy Team—receive updates on money in politics, expanding and defending voting rights, fair courts and reducing gridlock in Washington and learn about opportunities to engage.
2. Help spread the word—write LTEs, share through social media, or host an educational event connecting the need to build a better democracy with protecting our environment.
3. Build and deepen coalitions with local and state allies in the civil and voting rights communities, workers’ rights, and other issue organizations to build a truly representative democracy.
4. Share your work! If your Sierra Club group or chapter is engaging in efforts to reduce the undue influence of money in politics, ensure we have fair courts, or expanding voting rights, let us know, share your stories and efforts: democracy.program@sierraclub.org
5. Check out our website for action opportunities: sierraclub.org/democracy-program

SIERRA CLUB’S GOALS
Sierra Club’s long term goal is to ensure an equitable and participatory democracy in America with a positive public opinion of government. We will achieve this by:

1. Demonstrating through environmental and other issues that Americans’ core values are threatened by the undue influence of a handful of polluters and large campaign donors as well as by inequitable access to voting;
2. Utilizing public policy vehicles at the state and national level to drive public demand for solutions that make our democracy work for the many, not the few; and
3. Building the diverse coalition of national and local issue-based organizations and leaders working together to create an equitable and participatory democracy.