

# A Winning Game Plan

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Howard Schultz, founder, Chairman and CEO of Starbucks, has recently called upon executives not to make any political donations until there is a "courageous, long-term bipartisan debt and financial security plan that addresses both entitlements and revenue." This request for abstinence from Mr. Schultz reminds us of a different Schulz. That is Charles Schulz of Peanuts cartoon fame.

A favorite Charles Schulz cartoon of ours is one in which Lucy is holding a football for Charlie Brown to kick. Just as Charlie brings his leg forward Lucy pulls the ball away and Charlie falls to the ground.

In this instance, Howard Schultz and those corporate leaders who join him in the abstinence movement are like Charlie Brown. They think they are teeing the football up, and they are.

There is only one problem the person holding the ball will be the Superpacs, wealthy individuals and corporations who are playing by a different set of rules. They will continue to make highly partisan donations. Like Lucy they will pull the ball away and in doing so they will control the outcome of the game.

Let us be clear. We absolutely endorse Mr. Schultz's leadership and unequivocally support the need to overcome the rancorous and stalemated debate on the debt and deficit by implementing a solution such as the one he has proposed. Unfortunately, in this Citizens' United era, when good bi-partisan corporate leaders say we won't play, they cede the field to those who will. The law of unintended consequences comes into force.

Given this, we recommend that Mr. Schultz and his cohorts consider increased financial participation and larger political contributions rather than none at all. Those contributions should be given to the elected officials in Washington who have demonstrated a commitment to bi-partisan problem-solving rather than to purely political posturing.

Unfortunately, we have not seen a lot of bi-partisanship in the House. We have, however, seen some in the Senate. There's the Gang of Six (Dick Durbin (IL), Mark Warner (VA) and Kent Conrad (ND) on the Democratic side. Saxby Chambliss (GA), Mike Crapo (ID), and Tom Coburn (OK) on the Republican Side.) Others in the Senate who pass the bi-partisan test include Republicans: Kaye Bailey Hutchinson (TX), Lindsey Graham (SC), and Dick Lugar (IN). The bipartisan Democrats include: Bill Nelson (FL), Jon Tester (MT), and Bob Casey (PA).)

We also suggest that Mr. Schultz and the corporate leaders take the lead in advocating for changes to our broken political governance system. There are many problems with our current system. The major ones include:

1. The lack of an open primary system in the majority of the states which disenfranchises independents and non-partisans.
2. Gerrymandering which produces election boundaries that favor the incumbents and the party in power in each state.
3. A dysfunctional Congress created in large part by the way in which Congress does business such as cloture, seniority and the absence of term limits which promotes inertia and competitiveness instead of innovation and collaborative problem-solving.

Finally, we propose that those who align with Mr. Schultz unite together to combat the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision. This can be done by finding the right venue to bring a suit that causes that decision to be revisited and eventually reversed.

The Citizens United decision represented an extreme example of legislating from the bench rather than strict constructionism. It required an overwhelming leap of illogic for the Supreme Court to be able to extend first amendment rights which were intended to protect individuals to corporations. Nonetheless, this they did.

The removal of any limitations on corporate funding of candidate elections has led to the influx of "anonymous" and some not so anonymous grass-roots groups with mega-dollars to spend without restrictions. This has altered the political landscape fundamentally. It has elevated the "free speech" of the corporation above that of the citizen. When the corporation's voice speaks louder than the citizen's, democracy is at risk.

Mr. Schultz and his cohorts are to be commended for stepping forward as concerned citizen-leaders at this time of great urgency. By taking the actions outlined here, they can take the ball into their hands, shape the rules of the game and level the playing field in a manner that will produce a victory for the citizens of this country and corporate America.