



## Two sides of the coin

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**A**s most of us already know, the United States Supreme Court recently handed down a decision that reversed a previous law governing how corporations are allowed to spend money in political campaigns. In essence the decision states that corporations have the same rights as people when it comes to campaign money and that they should not be limited from spending their own money openly in the promotion or opposition of a candidate or issue, as long as they do so independently of the official campaign. This ruling is especially worrisome in light of the daily battles our profession faces, and we must be prepared.

Until now, corporations were limited in how they could spend their money. They either had to spend it through political action committees or 527 organizations – bringing contribution limitations and regulations to the table. These limitations were put in place to level the playing field when it came to politics. Big money from corporations or unions was subject to the same contribution limits as anyone else. This new ruling, however, adds a new wrinkle. While direct contributions to a candidate or campaign remain subject to those same limitations, money spent independently in the promotion or opposition of a candidate or issue is now exempt. This means we're going to see a lot more television ads during an election cycle or when a major issue arises.

One such issue you may have heard a little about recently is health care reform. Sound familiar? Well, the Supreme

Court's ruling has already been felt in this debate. A coalition called Employers for a Healthy Economy, led by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, has already spent millions in opposition to the reform, and could spend countless millions more without limitation. This is just one issue. Can you imagine what other issues might be pursued with such bottomless pockets?

While this is a scary scenario, it's important to remember that there are two sides to every coin. And while the wealthy corporations and insurance companies may be the first to take advantage of this ruling, there are ways that we can stand up to them on behalf of consumers. Our national organization, the American Association for Justice, is already waging this war head on, but it's important to keep in mind that we as members are now free to pursue the same goals. We must be prepared to engage our detractors. Arkansas consumers deserve nothing less.

The important thing to remember is that this ruling has serious implications for politics in Arkansas and around the country because those with bottomless pockets will now be free to spend as much money as they want. Already saturated airwaves will become even more so during campaign season, and organizations with limited budgets could find themselves facing uphill battles against those with bottomless pockets. So please keep this in mind the next time ATLA sends out a call for contributions. We are the other side to this coin, and without us, consumers will be fighting an uphill battle. •