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Citizens United, and Money in Politics

Campaigns need some money, and generally having more allows the candidate more options for campaigning and publicity. So, if more is better, what prevents a candidate from gaining too much advantage by having access to too much money. One answer is to implement limits that are reasonably low and are the same for all candidates in a particular level of race. Good, that seems fair, and this is what the Federal Elections Commission (FEC) says are the limits for this race, for a Congressional candidate.

Individual donors may contribute up to \$3,500.

That's a lot of money for most of us and very few people will consider it to be a limit at all. But, it tries to limit the influence of wealthy donors. You don't really want ONE donor looking more important to the candidate than the other donors. Nevertheless, this limit is maybe 70 times higher than a typical donation.

But wait, there are other kinds of donors that aren't PEOPLE but are something else. A candidate committee (another candidate with excess money) can contribute up to \$2,000. A Political Action Committee (PAC), or a political party, can also make contributions, and these are limited to \$5,000. Okay, this is more money, but it is limited. It can be a problem when a PAC makes a contribution on the premise that the candidate will offer favor after the election, sort of like a bribe. That smells bad, and many candidates try to avoid this link, especially when it differs from the public values of the candidate.

The real problem is with outside spending, by groups that have unlimited amounts of money and advertise on behalf of a candidate, or opposed to a candidate. Generally the actual donors are unknown, and the advertisements can be relentless and even dishonest. Wealthy donors can contribute unlimited amounts of their personal money to these PACs. But even worse, business owners and managers can direct unlimited amounts of corporate money into these PACs, regardless of how their employees and customers feel. And, why is this? It is because the US Supreme Court decision deciding that money is speech and speech is not to be limited.

And that's why political elections can be so ugly these days.

My husband and I were appalled by that Supreme Court decision, and in 2013 we worked hard to reduce the damage of the Citizens United decision. We were actively involved with the "Move to Amend" effort in Appleton, Wisconsin.

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The Supreme Court's decision in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission was issued on January 21, 2010. The Supreme Court designated corporate spending on elections as free speech.

The ruling has ushered in massive increases in political spending from outside groups, dramatically expanding the already outsized political influence of ultra-wealthy donors, corporations, and special interest groups.

The most significant outcomes of Citizens United have been the creation of super PACs, which empower the wealthiest donors, and the expansion of dark money through shadowy nonprofits that don't disclose their donors.

In late 2013 my husband and I participated with a group in our city of Appleton, Wisconsin that had the mission to stop some of the damage from the Citizens United decision of the Supreme Court.



Move to Amend (MTA) was (and still is) a campaign to help local residents understand how they can work to abolish "Corporate Personhood" and establish a government of, by, and for the people by joining the Move to Amend campaign.

Groups in Wisconsin's Fox Valley, where we lived at the time, gathered signatures to put a referendum on the November 2014 ballot asking voters if they support an amendment to fix this problem.

My husband, Alan, submitted a letter to the editor to the local Post-Crescent newspaper that was published in May 2014. This is part of it:

Nobody likes being told what to do. Nobody likes being told that their opinions don't matter and won't be listened to.

Our very small voice is a frustration to many of us as we wish our ideas would be heard by our elected representatives. We all realize that somebody else, someone with more money, is more likely to be heard by our representatives. This hardly makes them "our" representatives, does it? This is hardly the ideal of the "We the People" phrase that opens our Constitution.

Over time the US Supreme Court has created a situation not envisioned by our founders. Centuries of case law have evolved to the conclusion that corporations have the same rights as human beings, and that wealthy corporations and individuals have limitless influence of our political process.

Most people recognize the problems of endowing personhood to corporations and allowing unregulated political contributions. The courts created this mess. Politicians are not interested in fixing the problem. A constitutional amendment is the solution.

In April and May our group collected 4514 signatures from Appleton voters, enough to put our referendum on the November ballot.

Move to Amend resolution (November 2014 Ballot)

Shall the City of Appleton adopt Resolution, which reads as follows: Whereas, the Supreme Court's decisions in Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission and related case law allows unlimited political campaign spending to influence local, state, and federal elections; BE IT RESOLVED, that "We the People" of the City of Appleton, Wisconsin, call for reclaiming democracy from the expansion of corporate personhood rights and the corrupting influence of unregulated political contributions and spending. We stand with the Move to Amend campaign and communities across the country supporting passage of an amendment to the United States Constitution stating: 1. Only human beings - not corporations, limited liability companies, unions, nonprofit organizations, or similar associations - are endowed with constitutional rights; and 2. Money is not speech, and therefore regulating political contributions and spending is not equivalent to limiting political speech. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we hereby instruct our state and federal representatives to enact resolutions and legislation to advance this effort. YES or NO

Points of information we shared:

43 other Wisconsin municipalities, cities and counties had already passed advisory board resolutions or ballot referendums. Our efforts got this resolution on Appleton's ballots. 11 other communities placed similar resolutions on their ballots.

The goal was to have Wisconsin and other states join the 16 state legislatures that had already requested an amendment to the U.S. Constitution clarifying that inalienable rights belong to human beings and that money is not a form of protected free speech and can be regulated in political campaigns.

Simply put, voters are saying they support an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to reign in money in politics. Similar ballot questions had already passed by wide margins 43 times in Wisconsin.

Anyone who hasn't made up his mind yet on this issue needs simply ask himself whether he wants to have a say in how our ("we the people") government works or if they want to leave this to corporations and very wealthy people.

Our efforts were successful!

The day after the election, November 5, 2014, the headlines said:

Move to Amend Wins Big at the Ballot: Americans Ready to Amend the Constitution.
In Wisconsin's 12 communities with a Move to Amend resolution on the ballot not a single measure garnered less than 70% support.

Appleton's results:
Yes: 18,551
No: 6,550
(Passed by 74%)

It was RESOLVED that we hereby instruct our state and federal representatives to enact resolutions and legislation to advance this effort.

The fact that this issue has not yet been resolved is evidence that our state and federal representatives did not listen to the wishes of the people. We must elect representatives that care about this issue. I care about it. I want to limit the influence of money corrupting elections.



I don't have a picture of myself gathering signatures in April and May, but this is my husband. Alan had a small table and a sign, and he posted himself on a sidewalk along a street near our home, with public parking behind. He waved at passing drivers, and some of them stopped and signed the petition requesting the resolution for the ballot.

Here is a good link to understand the corrupting influence of money in politics.
<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/citizens-united-explained>

My issue documents are intended to evolve during the course of my campaign, so please notice the revision date at the bottom of the page. If you wish to comment, please let me know. If you have other issues for me to comment on, please let me know.