



How does *Citizens United* affect our Town?

The corrupting influence of uncontrolled spending on political campaigns, accelerated by the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* has widespread destructive consequences felt at the federal, state, and local levels. This corruption is devastating communities all over America and eviscerating the ability of local governments to protect and provide opportunity for their citizens.

Corporate and Rich Person Spending Controls the Decisions of Our Legislators

In 2012 the top 32 individual donations to SuperPacs totaled 313 million dollars.¹ This is the same amount that was contributed by 2.7 million individuals who donated <\$200 each in that election cycle. Who do you think the politicians who received the advantages of this SuperPac money really represent? The egregious levels of outside spending on the federal level are well documented. The super-rich dominated the 2012 election cycle, with over one-third of all contributions to Super PACs coming from just ten individuals.² **In comparison to these mammoth sums of money, it only takes a modest amount of money to have a transformative impact on a local election.** If multi-million dollar Super-PACs can buy the victory of even presidential candidates, then what's stopping them from influencing local political elections? And they now are.

Consider This: In the April 2012 elections for Oklahoma City Council the Super-PAC "Committee for Oklahoma City Momentum" spent \$400,000 on four candidates.³ The salary for an Oklahoma City Council member is \$12,000 annually.⁴ Three of these four candidates won their campaigns. The only candidate who was able to defeat one of these Super Pac candidates noted deep concerns he saw with the democratic implications of a Super-PAC spending large sums on campaign ads without disclosing its donors.⁵

And This: Durham County in North Carolina is also experiencing the effects of SuperPACs. The SuperPAC "Durham Partnership for Progress" – funded by a development firm – spent thousands of dollars on a mailer supporting four council people who support a controversial development project that the firm, Southern Durham Development, plans to build. The SuperPAC's support helped elect two of those council people into office in elections held on May 8, 2012.⁶

Small businesses oppose *Citizens United*

Sixty-six percent of small business owners understand that money in politics is having a negative impact and a vast majority are opposed to the *Citizens United* Supreme Court's ruling.⁷ Their concern? That the excessive influence of the very wealthiest will "set us back in our efforts to operate our businesses responsibly and promote a vibrant, equitable, and sustainable economy."⁸ And many see small community businesses shutting down because of favors to the large corporations that receive immense benefits from legislation they got passed.

Big corporations' ability to put small businesses out of business has significant effects on the health of the local economy, the employment rate and the diversity and survival of small businesses in a town. Elected officials generally understand this dynamic and are inclined to take actions to protect small businesses. However, when larger business interests can provide

unlimited funds to influence elections, elected officials can no longer afford to make decisions they know are best for their community and those who do can be run out of office.

And this problem is more destructive when large business and SuperPacs get involved in races in towns and cities across the state – which is happening more frequently each year.

Further, *Citizens United* gives large corporations and their lobbyists more leverage to abuse tax loopholes and offshore tax havens. Currently this abuse results in each small business owner in America being shortchanged by an average of \$2,116 annually.⁹ These practices, which also funnel money away from services essential to cities and towns, will only be exacerbated as the corruption increases.

Super-PACs decrease voter turnout

Recent polling conducted by the Brennan Center for Justice further demonstrates that *Citizens United* and the rise of Super PACs have harmed local democracy at its core by further sapping voter enthusiasm for the idea that their vote matters.¹⁰ It shows that people are in fact **less** likely to vote as a result of the ruling; this especially holds true among less wealthy individuals.¹¹

Corporations' and wealthy individuals' unparalleled ability to drown out the voices of ordinary people through unlimited spending in elections inevitably wears down an electorate that has already been losing faith in politicians at all levels. Citizens mistrusting its government to the point where they abstain from voting is a huge threat to our representative democracy both on a local and federal level.

We speak about our work with many individuals who are convinced that their vote, and our efforts are useless. They believe the political system is so bought and corrupt that eventually the political system will own their local representatives as well – so why vote.

Communities nationwide must demand a constitutional amendment to restore useful First Amendment rights to We the People

This movement for a constitutional amendment is, at its core, a grassroots effort driven by very real concerns about challenges to our democracy that reverberate in each and every community. Many of the improvements to the constitution came by way of citizens forcing change because of corruption they observed. Each time the citizens demanded change, the politicians acted only when enough citizens spoke out. Only when the citizen voice was big enough did the politicians create a constitutional amendment. This has certainly been the case in democracy-expanding direct election of Senators, and the Women's Suffrage and Civil Rights amendments.

The movement to restore our republic, from a political culture of legal corruption, continues in this proud tradition – addressing a crisis that impacts each and every citizen and community. Uniting to pass a local resolution in your town is a necessary step toward restoring free, fair and productive elections to the American people both locally and nationally.

In Wisconsin, state level legislation in concert with defunding and politicizing of agencies that are supposed to protect our local environment and rights, has left both local and county government unable to prevent the encroachment of large corporations on our safety, economy and rights. This is currently most notable in the efforts of the fracking and concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) industries.

This is also evident in the more than 160 laws passed by our state legislature, behind closed doors between 2010 and 2017, that lessen and remove the sovereign rights of local municipalities to protect their neighbors' property, health, safety and opportunity. That's oppression, not representation.

- 1) Public Citizen's analysis of Federal Election Commission (FEC) data. See Congress Watch (January 2011). "12 Months After: The Effects of *Citizens United* on Elections and the Integrity of the Legislative Process." Retrieved 15 Sept, 2011, from <http://www.citizen.org/documents/Citizens-United-20110113.pdf>.
- 2) Dunbar, J. (26 April 2012). "Top 10 donors make up a third of donations to Super PACs." IWatch News. Retrieved 3 May 2012 from <http://www.iwatchnews.org/2012/04/26/8753/top-10-donors-make-third-donations-super-pacs>.
- 3) NewsOk (2012). "Oklahoma elections: Ed Shadid wins Oklahoma City Council Ward 2 seat", newsok.com . Retrieved 5/1/2012 from <http://newsok.com/oklahoma-elections-ed-shadid-wins-oklahoma-city-council-ward-2-seat/article/3555775/?page=1>.
- 4) City of Oklahoma "Mayor and Council", okc.gov. Retrieved 5/10/2012 from <http://www.okc.gov/council/index.html>
- 5) NewsOk (2012). "Oklahoma elections: Ed Shadid wins Oklahoma City Council Ward 2 seat", newsok.com. Retrieved 5/1/2012 from <http://newsok.com/oklahoma-elections-ed-shadid-wins-oklahoma-city-council-ward-2-seat/article/3555775/?page=1>.
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- 7) Dunbar, J. (26 April 2012). "Top 10 donors make up a third of donations to Super PACs." IWatch News. Retrieved 3 May 2012 from <http://www.iwatchnews.org/2012/04/26/8753/top-10-donors-make-third-donations-super-pacs>.
- 8) ASB Council (2012). "Business Statement in support of government by the people", asbcouncil.org. Retrieved 1/5/2012 from http://www.asbcouncil.org/sites/default/files/files/Business_Case_for_Business_for_Democracy.pdf.
- 9) U.S. PIRG (2012). "Picking Up the Tab: Average Citizens and Small Businesses Pay the Price for Offshore Tax Havens." Retrieved 3 May 2012 from <http://mainstreetalliance.org/5712/tax-haven-abuse-picking-up-the-tab/>
- 10) Brennan Center for Justice (2012). "Poll: Super PACs Leave Americans Less Likely to Vote", brennancenter.org. Retrieved 1/5/2012 from http://www.brennancenter.org/content/resource/poll_super_pacs_leave_americans_less_likely_to_vote/.
- 11) The Nation (2012). " People of Color Less Likely to Vote Because of Super PAC Influence", thenation.org. Retrieved on 5/1/2012 from <http://www.thenation.com/blog/167579/people-color-less-likely-vote-because-super-pac-influence>.

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