



Why Towns are Calling for a Democracy Reform Amendment

On January 21, 2010, in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, the Supreme Court overturned a century of established precedent by ruling that corporate spending on candidate elections cannot be limited under the First Amendment. In so doing, the court declared that corporations – legal entities defined by, and subject to, the laws of individual *states* – are indistinguishable from *people* with respect to *federal* law and the U.S. Constitution.

The result has been unprecedented spending by corporations and unions in our elections. Expectedly, those who spend the most win the most. In the 2012 elections, House of Representatives candidates with the most money supporting their elections won 94 percent of their elections. The figure was 79 percent for the Senate. Of the 43 candidates who self-funded their campaigns in 2012, only 9 won their elections.

Money talks, but more unfortunately, those who finance candidate's campaigns also gain unprecedented influence with the candidate they financed. The voice of "We the People" has been drowned out by interests with access to vast resources of campaign contribution dollars.

This movement to get corrupting money out of campaigns is not a partisan issue. Republicans, Democrats and Independents are concerned about the Citizens United decision as evidenced by these statements concerning the Citizens United ruling shortly after it was passed.

"I think that there's going to be, over time, a backlash, ... when you see the amounts of union and corporate money that's going to go into political campaigns." – **Sen. John McCain**

"This decision was a terrible mistake. Presented with a relatively narrow legal issue, the Supreme Court chose to roll back laws that have limited the role of corporate money in federal elections since Teddy Roosevelt was president." – **Sen. Russ Feingold**

"What I worry about is that we are turning campaigns over to about 100 people in this country, and they are going to be able to advocate their cause at the expense of your cause. The only way you can change this, I think, is through a constitutional amendment," – **Lindsay Graham, April 2015, Republican Candidate for President**

So what can be done? We could wait, for years perhaps, for the Supreme Court to revisit this decision. Or, we could amend our constitution as has been done 17 times in the past with citizens forcing it, and is advocated by United to Amend. Web site: www.WIUTA.org

United to Amend is calling for an amendment to the US Constitution to clarify in the Constitution that inalienable rights belong to human beings only, and that money is not a form of protected free speech under the First Amendment and can be limited in political campaigns. Our constitution can be amended by our Congress by a two-thirds vote in both houses, or the people can demand it if two-thirds of state legislatures demand it. The vast majority of our congress persons are not likely to allow the Congress to do this – it **MUST** be done from the bottom up.

But it takes a strong movement to back an effort to amend the constitution. Getting towns to pass resolutions can help bring pressure upon congress to take up this issue. Fifty-two towns in Wisconsin have approved the resolution in support of the process to amend our constitution.

Fully, to date, 163 municipalities, including these towns, cities, villages and counties have passed similar resolutions. These are counted in over 820 communities in the U.S. that have passed resolutions asking for a constitutional amendment to get the big money out of politics. And as a result of this community, grass-roots action, 20 states have similarly called for a constitutional amendment. Wisconsin is not yet one of them.

Across many polls and surveys in the U.S. in the last five years, 85% to 95% of citizens, Republicans, Independents and Democrats, believe there should be limits on the amount of money corporations, unions, and other organizations can contribute to organizations influencing our politicians. This desire to restore our republic, and representation is clearly non-partisan.

Also, about two thirds of small business owners support similar resolutions, to create a more level playing field for them to compete with large corporations. Likewise, the amendment would benefit local municipalities which have been losing funding and legislative control over local issues as wealthy and powerful interests in Wisconsin and Washington acquire ever greater influence over our elected officials.

Towns across the state, and country, realize that they have lost, and continued to lose, their home rule sovereignty to the powerful politicians who represent the interests of their funders. Town leaders increasingly realize that they have lost the ability to serve and protect their local citizens. Between 2010 and 2017 the Wisconsin State Legislature passed over 160 laws and rules that take away rights of local communities or create unfunded mandates – while reducing support to towns.

How can we expect our politicians to represent us when they are given millions to represent others?