

Money in Politics: What Can a Person Do?

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This week, Sen. Kathleen Vinehout writes about amending the US constitution to overturn ***Citizens' United***

- . Polls show that almost universally people are opposed to the Supreme Court's ruling on ***Citizens' United***
- . She discusses how the constitution could be amended and what actions people can take to reduce the influence of money in politics.

ALMA - "What can I do to stop corporate money from taking over our country?" Betty from Buffalo County asked me. She joined about 20 local people in viewing the film Koch Exposed that focused on the power of a few to manipulate elections.

Money in politics is almost universally hated. In poll after poll Americans say money is not free speech and corporations are not people. This is one issue upon which people of all political stripes can agree.

Immediately following the Supreme Court decision on Citizens United an ABC News Washington Post poll of over 1,000 adults found 8 in 10 opposed the court ruling and 72% favored legislative action to reverse the court's decision. Among those who agree with the Tea Party's views 73% disagreed with the Supreme Court ruling.

On April 1st, 13 Wisconsin communities overwhelmingly approved referenda supporting a national constitutional amendment to overturn Citizens United. Even in the Republican community of Waukesha 69% of voters supported the constitutional amendment.

The advisory referenda in Wisconsin communities were placed on the ballot by local people who agreed with work of a grassroots group known as Move to Amend.

The ballot question asked voters if they agreed with a constitutional amendment to assure that only natural persons (not corporations) have constitutional rights and that money is not free speech.

According to the Move to Amend website (www.movetoamend.org) over three-dozen local citizen led or ballot initiatives passed in the U.S. While 274 units of local government passed resolutions calling for a constitutional amendment.

A resolution calling for a constitutional amendment passed at least one house of the Legislature in over a dozen states including Minnesota; but not Wisconsin.

A bipartisan group of Senators, including myself, and 27 Democratic Assembly members introduced a resolution calling for a constitutional amendment overturning Citizens United. The resolution failed to garner enough support for a vote in either house.

The constitutional amendment process is an arduous one. Article Five of the United States Constitution describes two different processes by which the Constitution may be amended. The first is through a two-thirds vote of members present in each House of the U.S. Congress. Second is by a two-thirds vote of a Constitutional Convention called by Congress. The first method is the only one that has been used. The Constitutional amendment is then sent to the states for ratification. Three fourths of state Legislatures must ratify the amendment. Congress sets a time limit by which states must act and how states must ratify the amendment.

States can pressure Congress by passing their own resolutions. This is what happened in Minnesota and is why some of my colleagues and I sponsored the resolution in Wisconsin. Local people can pressure the state. This is why thirteen resolutions were added to the April ballots around Wisconsin.

Changing the Constitution can take a long time. The first national efforts to pass the 19th

Amendment – giving women the right to vote - happened in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. The Amendment was finally ratified by the last needed state in 1920 (Wisconsin was the first state to ratify the 19th Amendment).

The result of the over-70 year struggle is something we now take for granted. But it wouldn't have happened without the early efforts of women in Seneca Falls.

We must work to amend the Constitution to limit money in politics. While we move toward this goal there are other actions you can and should take to limit the influence of money in politics.

First, vote. Encourage all you know to vote.

Before you vote, do your homework. Read up on the positions of candidates. Talk with candidates. Take note of which candidates won't appear at a public forum or community gathering. Don't be swayed by negative advertising. Negative ads are designed to influence you to vote against a candidate or not vote at all.

Pay attention to who is paying for ads and mailers – much of the money in politics comes through outside groups with a vested interest in the outcome of the election.

You can lessen the effect of money in politics by refusing to let money buy your vote.

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