



Letters to the editor, The Courier-Gazette
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When money talks, democracy walks

Last November on Election Day I volunteered to help Maine Citizens for Clean Elections gather signatures at the polls in my town from voters who support a 28th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution for the purpose of overturning the Citizens United v. the Federal Election Commission Supreme Court decision. I have thought a lot about my experience that day.

That decision three years ago struck down some of the last limits on money corporations and unions are permitted to spend in support of or in opposition to a candidate or ballot issue. It severely weakened the ability of Congress and the states to regulate the raising and spending of money in elections at all levels. One outcome was that we saw a substantial increase in money spent this past year from larger entities, not all of which has been traceable. Another outcome is that citizens are pushing back with proposals of remedying constitutional amendments.

I was thrilled back on Election Day to find so many voters eager to record their support for such an amendment, but I've had a sobering thought since then. Could it be that we will sign anything we think might bring relief from the deluge of campaign mailings, media ads and phone calls? Yes, we want relief from that, but I hope we realize there are much more serious issues here.

Elections do cost money, and having money helps to win. Public for-profit corporations have an obligation to act to maximize profit for their shareholders, which is not the same as acting in the public interest as we expect of our legislators. If it takes a constitutional amendment to clarify that corporations do not have the right to spend money in our elections, then that is what we need to have. A bonus will be relief from numbing campaigns when our legislators are free to craft rules for fair and open campaign funding.

Supporters gathered at the State House at a Jan. 22 rally to hear about the ongoing amendment process in Maine and elsewhere. The rally was organized by Maine Citizens for Clean Elections in Portland. I and 13 other Knox County voters attended, including local Reps. Chuck Kruger and Jeff Evangelos. Sen. Chris Johnson, who represents Washington and Friendship, also attended. Rep. Evangelos is a co-sponsor of a resolution calling on Congress to overturn the Citizens United decision by means of a constitutional amendment. Sen. Ed Mazurek, Rep. Joan Welsh and Rep. Elizabeth Dickerson will also support a resolution.

At the rally we heard about states, 11 so far, and municipalities across the country that have passed resolutions in favor of an amendment. Camden and Thomaston have recently become the 24th and 25th Maine municipalities that have done this. Friendship voters will take up the issue at town meeting March 19.

Please join me in supporting this nonpartisan citizen movement to keep big money out of our elections.

Bill Michaud

Friendship