

Fairgoers Express Views on Money in Politics

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This week Senator Vinehout writes about a poll conducted at the Jackson County Fair regarding the *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision and money in politics. Most fairgoers favored amending the constitution to change the *Citizens United* decision. Across Wisconsin, efforts are ongoing to push an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that states 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 regulated in political campaigns.

ALMA - "Corporations are not people," the Black River Falls woman told me. "People in corporations already get a vote and a chance to speak out just like the rest of us. Giving corporations a vote and a chance to speak out means those people are getting two votes. That's not fair."

That statement summarized the opinion of three quarters of the fairgoers in Jackson County who chose to stop and vote on the statement "corporations are people."

"We should amend the constitution to limit money in politics" garnered support from nearly 9 in 10 participants in the voluntary poll. A nearly unanimous 98% of fairgoers voting in the poll agreed with the statement "Every citizen should be encouraged to vote."

Although unscientific, the poll does reflect attitudes across the United States related to the 2010 *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision which held that corporations and unions can spend as much money as they like in elections. The court decision opened the door for the "super PACs" of the 2012 presidential race.

In a later 2012 court ruling, *Knox v Service Employees International (SEIU) Local 1000*, the high court limited the ability of unions to use money in campaigns making the inequality in contributions between unions and corporations even greater.

Immediately following the high 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 decision. People of all political persuasions were opposed to the decision including 73% of those who strongly agreed with the Tea Party's position on issues.

A 2012 Greenburg Quinlan Rosnax Research poll found 56% of respondents agreed the constitution should be amended to change the *Citizens United* decision and nearly as many agreed that corporations should not have the same rights as people.

Fairgoers told me corporations' "speech" is not the same as individual's speech. The dollars corporations can sink into campaigns far outweigh most people's ability to contribute to campaigns. Because of the 2012 rush of corporate money in campaigns people feel more distant from and more cynical about the operations of government.

But this feeling has not kept people from being involved in efforts to change things.

Efforts are afoot across Wisconsin to amend the U.S. Constitution to change the *Citizens United* decision. The group, Move to Amend and others around the state are organized to push an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that states 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 regulated in political campaigns.

I recently co-sponsored a bill that would call for a statewide advisory referendum on the *Citizens United* decision. Voters would be asked if they support action by Congress and the State Legislature to amend to the Constitution to state that only human beings are endowed with constitutional rights, and money is not protected speech.

Most fairgoers hadn't heard about formal efforts starting the process to amend our constitution. But they were eager to share their opinion about money in politics.

Many felt money from outside the state of Wisconsin should be banned from campaigns. Others felt outside groups should not be allowed to campaign. Still others wanted the veil of secrecy lifted from so-called "independent expenditure" groups – those private third party groups with appealing sounding names that spend so much money in campaigns.

Overall, citizens wanted to express their opinions and wanted elected officials to listen. And they wanted to learn, in an unvarnished way, what was really happening in Madison.

I put together a slide show about the state budget and brochure summarizing provisions of the budget. Fairgoers took time to look at the printed version of the slide show and offer their opinions on the state debt and the deficit.

When I left late one night, a woman stopped me and said, "I really appreciate you being here – you're the only state elected person I got the chance to speak with. Thanks for coming."

To everyone who stopped to vote or to offer an opinion I say thanks! I value your opinion!

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