

September 5, 2013

Dear Senator,

We write to urge you to oppose AB225. If passed by the Senate, this bill would double the contribution limits to Wisconsin political campaigns and allow big money to further drown out the voices of Wisconsin voters. While some have lauded this bill because it contains a provision to implement an online registration system, this provision comes nowhere close to making this bill worth passing.

Special interest money has long had a corrosive effect on our politics, but in 2010 the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision unleashed a new era of unprecedented spending on our elections. Election spending in Wisconsin has tripled since the Citizens United decision. This wave of outside cash threatens to drown out the voices of ordinary citizens in our democracy in Wisconsin. Increasing contribution limits will only worsen this problem.

Not only is there more money pouring into Wisconsin elections, but political power in Wisconsin and in the country is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a wealthy (and shrinking) few, which threatens the promise of a government which should be of, by, and for the people. The federal 2012 election cycle displayed the ability of a miniscule fraction of Americans to dominate election spending using high contribution limits. In Senate races, \$233 million — 40% of all money spent — came from just 0.02% of Americans making contributions at the limit of \$2,500. In the House, 55.1% of all contributions—a total of about \$397 million—came from donations of \$1,000 or more, from just 0.06% of the population. The impact of average voters was tiny by comparison: In the House, donations of less than \$200 accounted for a mere 25% of all donations, and for just 20% in the Senate.

Just 32 billionaires and corporations giving an average of \$9.9 million apiece matched the money 3.7 million small donors gave to the Romney and Obama campaigns combined for the 2012 presidential election. If money equals speech as the U.S. Supreme Court currently believes, then those 32 megadonors spoke with more than 115,000 times the volume of the millions of small donors.

The best way to put citizens back in the driver's seat will be to overturn the Supreme Court's disastrous Citizens United ruling. ***We urge you to co-sponsor the resolution (LRB 1457/5) to place a referendum on the November 2014 statewide ballot, and allow the voters of Wisconsin to be heard on the issue of Citizens United.***

Addressing Citizens United is just a start—it must go hand-in-hand with small donor incentives and lower contribution limits. We urge you to follow in the footsteps of Republican U.S. Representative Tom Petri, who has repeatedly introduced a bill that would reinstate a \$50 federal tax credit for campaign contributions, a program that would boost public participation in the campaign finance process.

We also urge you to use matching public funds to encourage state level candidates to depend on small donations from their constituents and not wealthy out-of-state interests (as we saw in the recall elections). Lastly, we urge you to lower the donation limit to a level that all citizens—not just the wealthy few—can realistically afford: \$100.

Outside the Capitol, citizens of every political stripe believe money is playing far too great a role in elections, is having a poisonous effect on governing, and needs to be reined in. The Assembly's bill takes the position that there is not enough big money in politics and even larger campaign contributions are needed.

It's time to implement systems that protect our democracy by empowering the average citizen, while reducing the corrosive influence of big money. AB 225 goes in the opposite direction. We urge you to oppose this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

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