

Chair Hoyle, Vice-chairs and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HJM4. My name is Steve Bintliff, a resident of Tigard, and co-founder of a citizen advocacy group called Tigard First. My testimony today is on their behalf.

We are concerned about the use of independent campaign expenditures to undermine our democratic process as a result of the 2010 Supreme Court ruling of Citizen's United v. FEC and how increasingly, corporations are now using their Court-appointed Constitutional Rights to avoid responsibility for their actions.

In 2013, Some of our group's members testified in support of HJM6, which called on Congress to amend the Constitution to clarify "the distinction between the rights of natural persons and the rights of corporations and other legal entities" and also to "clarify that Congress and state legislatures may regulate all moneys raised and spent for political purposes". HJM6 went on to pass both Houses with bi-partisan support.

This session, HJM4 is asking for an amendment that does the same thing, but this time, we're calling for an Article 5 Constitutional Convention to create the amendment. Like it's predecessor, the amendment would have two principles: That Corporations are not People, and that Money is not Speech.

After 5 years under the Citizen's United ruling, most of you agree that we need to do something about the role of special interest money in our political system. So why not just amend the Constitution to allow Congress to regulate political spending? Why do we have to explicitly say that 'Corporations are not people'?

Citizen's United was not just about regulating political spending. It was based on over 100 years of previous rulings that have progressively given Corporations and other artificial legal entities the same Constitutional rights as you and I. Citizen's United borrowed heavily from Buckley v. Valeo, in which the court equated the expenditure of money for elections with the Corporate exercise of free speech. Although the emphasis in our public dialogue is on the runaway spending in our political system, corporations are aggressively using their 'Constitutional Rights' in other areas of our society.

Today, as I testify before you, exercising my Constitutional Right to Free Speech, Monsanto and the Grocery Manufacturers Association are exercising theirs, by suing the state of Vermont over the GMO labeling law that was passed by the Vermont Legislature. They claim the law 'violates the companies' right to free speech' by compelling them to label GMO foods.

Last year, we saw the Supreme Court rule that Hobby Lobby, a national arts and crafts retailer, had the right to exercise it's freedom of religion under the First Amendment. Increasingly, in addition to the 1st amendment, Corporations are now claiming protection under the 4th, 5th, 7th and 14th amendments to avoid regulation, public disclosure, social responsibility and accountability.

In order to fix the damage caused by Citizen's United, we have to address the issue of 'Corporate Constitutional Rights'. In HJM 4, we do this by very clearly saying that the Bill of Rights applies only to you and I – natural persons. Rights and privileges can be granted to

Corporations and artificial legal entities by our government, but they are NOT inalienable rights. HJM4 is the ONLY resolution that addresses the legal foundation on which Citizen's United was built and I urge this committee to approve HJM4 and send it to the full House with a Do Pass recommendation.

Sincerely,

Stephen Bintliff
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