

Chairman Hoyle, members of the Rules Committee:
My name is Joseph Stevenson. I'm a retired nurse from Astoria, and I came here today to speak in support of HJM2.

54 years ago at the age of 18 I joined the Freedom Riders in their civil rights campaign. I was arrested, beaten, and jailed in Houston, Texas in August of 1961. I was young, actually too young to vote at the time, but I took that action because I believed that the racial discrimination embedded in the laws of our land at the time was a flagrant injustice and a disgrace to our nation.

Today I see an even more fundamental problem embedded in the laws of our land. I'm not a lawyer, but it appears to me that with the Citizens United decision the Supreme Court has effectively declared that our government is for sale to the highest bidder. All reasonable restraints to campaign financing have been removed, and now our public servants and candidates are no longer evaluated by the quality of their ideas but by how much money they can solicit from donors with deep pockets and obvious agendas. I think we'd all agree: This is clearly not what our founding fathers had in mind for our young democracy.

I see this as the signal issue of our times, but this time around I am choosing not to engage in civil disobedience, instead I am here today, appealing to my own state representatives to take action.

Looking back through history, I see a long line of reformers who've worked hard to expand the right of self-determination to more and more people. Once upon a time

Kings and Lords ruled over us, declaring that they had the “divine right” to do so, bestowed on them by God and maintained by the blood-line. This idea, in America at least, has long been recognized as absurd.

It used to be that only men could vote and people could be owned as property. But as I look around the world as it is now.....I see a lot of empty castles. I see men who won the right to live free, I see women who won the right to vote, I see that David sometimes defeats Goliath, and I see a Constitution that’s been amended many times. The reason I was not old enough to vote in 1961 is that the 26th amendment wasn’t passed until 10 years later.

Now it’s time to sweep another bad idea into the dustbin of history through a convention of the states to propose an amendment to the Constitution specifically focussed on this issue – the idea that those with more money should have more of a political voice than the rest of us. We must create a wall of separation between wealth and state in order to restore Free and Fair elections in America. Congress is not going to act on this, the courts have made their position clear, it is clearly up to the STATES to save our democracy.

I urge you all to vote yes on HJM2. Thank you for the chance to testify.