

Going Local To Make Change Nationally

by Kaitlin Sopoci-Belknap

In the year and a half since the Citizens United decision, Americans from all walks of life have become concerned about corporate dominance of our government and our society as a whole. In Citizens United v. FEC, the US Supreme Court—in an act of outrageous “judicial activism”—gutted existing campaign finance laws by ruling that corporations, wealthy individuals, and other entities can spend unlimited amounts of money on “independent” political campaigns.

Throughout the country people have responded by organizing against “corporate personhood,” a court-created precedent that illegitimately gives corporations rights that were intended for human beings.

The movement is flowering not in the halls of Congress, but at the local level, where all real social movements start. Every day, Americans experience the devastation caused by unaccountable corporations. Thanks to the hard work of local organizers, Boulder, CO could become the next community to officially join this growing effort. Councilmember Macon Cowles is proposing to place a measure on the November ballot, giving Boulder voters the opportunity to support an amendment to the US Constitution abolishing corporate personhood and declaring that money is not speech.

At the forefront of this movement is Move to Amend, a national coalition of hundreds of organizations and over 121,000 individuals (and counting). Move to Amend is committed to building a grassroots movement to abolish corporate personhood, to hold corporations accountable to the public, and ultimately to fulfill the promise of an American democratic republic.

Boulder is not alone in this fight, nor is it the first community to consider such a resolution. In April, voters in Madison and Dane County, WI



graphic: Free Range Longmont

overwhelmingly approved measures calling for an end to corporate personhood and the legal status of money as speech by 84% and 78% respectively. Similar resolutions have been passed in nearly 30 other cities and counties. Resolutions have also been introduced in the state legislatures of both Vermont and Washington.

Despite the momentum, Move to Amend organizers know this won't be an easy fight. Corporate America controls traditional media, and has invested heavily in politicians, lobbyists, and extremist groups to oppose our efforts. We can't expect Congress to act, nor can we depend on the courts to solve a problem of their own making. We draw our strategy and inspiration from the great social movements of history.

The abolition of slavery, the struggle for women's suffrage, trade unions, and the civil rights movement all started with grassroots organizing. The ruling elites denounced these movements as un-American, and they will make the same accusation against this effort today. Others claimed that those movements went “too far,” and were unrealistic. Thankfully, folks before us did not quit or give up. They gained traction with solid strategy, unwavering commitment, and moral authority.

Move To Amend proudly identifies with this tradition of engaged citizen participation. Building momentum with local organizing and resolutions is our best chance of driving a constitutional amendment into Congress.

Move to Amend is gaining momentum rapidly in communities throughout the country precisely because the problems of corporate power are most evident locally. Developers seeking special favors pour money into elections. Big polluters avoid investigations and litigation by hiding behind their illegitimate “rights.” Bad employers lie—with no legal consequences—to the public about unfair labor practices. People see it every day. They get it and they're ready to fight back. Move to Amend is here to help them do that with a strategy for long-term success.

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