



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE
Milwaukee County
CHRIS ABELE • COUNTY EXECUTIVE

DATE: May 9, 2014
TO: The Honorable Milwaukee Board of Supervisors
FROM: Chris Abele, Milwaukee County Executive
RE: Veto of County Board File No. 14-219 on an advisory referendum relating to the Supreme Court's Citizens United ruling.

I am vetoing County Board File No. 14-219 pursuant to the authority granted to me by Article IV, Section 23(a) of the Wisconsin Constitution and Section 59.17(6) of the Wisconsin Statutes.

The County Board adopted a resolution on April 24, 2014 providing for an advisory referendum on whether the U.S. Constitution should be amended to establish that only human beings, not corporations, are entitled to Constitutional rights, and money is not speech, and therefore regulating political contributions and spending is not equivalent to limiting political speech.

As I told you when this exact same issue came up in 2012, I believe the high court's decision corrupts the political process. Justice John Stevens may have put it best when he wrote in his dissenting opinion, "A democracy cannot function effectively when its constituent members believe laws are being bought and sold."

I am certainly not alone, for years polls have shown this is a deeply unpopular issue. According to a poll released this week by Democracy Corps, 80% of people are against the Supreme Court's Citizens United ruling. I mention this poll because it is a powerful indicator of the national sentiment around this issue and it didn't cost a penny of taxpayer dollars.

Putting this advisory referendum on the ballot is expected to cost as much as \$40,000. I don't believe the taxpayers of Milwaukee County are interested in spending their hard earned money on a referendum that does not bind decision-makers. Spending \$40,000 on this referendum means less money for transit, mental health care and senior centers and it does not get us any closer to overturning Citizens United.

This cost is doubly unfair to people who live in Shorewood, Wauwatosa and Whitefish Bay. They recently paid for a similar referendum on their municipal ballots.

In the past few years I have spoken with state legislators and members of our congressional caucus about this issue and my concern over the Supreme Court's ruling. If we want to successfully overturn Citizens United we need congressional action or a constitutional convention called for by two-thirds of the State legislatures. That is where we should be directing our efforts and resources.

In 2013, I personally donated money to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to help cover legal costs in their fight against the Wisconsin Voter ID Law. I'm happy the law was recently struck down by a federal judge and I believe it will continue to be found unconstitutional. I mention this success to Supervisors because I believe it's an example of a better and more effective way to address these issues I know we agree on.

I ask the Board to uphold this veto and we can work together to lobby the appropriate decision makers to overturn Citizens United.