



## New Year, New Mission – Put an End to Big-Money Politics

By Kara O'Connor, Wisconsin Farmers Union Government Relations Director

This week marks the seventh anniversary of the infamous *Citizen's United* Supreme Court decision, which held that unions and corporations are “people” under the first amendment, and are therefore entitled to exercise their right of “free speech” in the form of unlimited campaign contributions to political candidates.

This week also marks the inauguration of America's next president, Donald Trump. Much has been made about the importance of rural voters in Trump's election, with many pundits, politicians, and commentators asking since November: “What does rural America want?”

As someone who spends lots of time in rural Wisconsin, I would sum it up this way: rural Americans want an end to business-as-usual politics in Washington. Seven years ago the *Citizens United* decision opened the floodgates on unlimited spending by SuperPACs, and now rural America is saying enough is enough.

In addition to voting for Donald Trump on November 8, residents in eighteen Wisconsin communities voted to amend the U.S. Constitution to roll-back the power of unlimited money in our elections and clarify that only human beings should have inalienable human rights, and money is not the same thing as free speech.

All of these referenda passed with overwhelming majorities: Rock County (86%), Reedsburg (86%), Manitowoc (81%), Delafield (79%), Neshkoro (88%), New Glarus (88%), Spring Valley (91%), Osceola (86%), Mt. Horeb (84%), Monticello (86%), Clayton (86%) and the towns of New Glarus (83%), Harris (65%), Springdale (86%), Decatur (89%), Mount Pleasant (84%), Cadiz (87%) and Lake Tomahawk (91%).

In a state where even winning political candidates rarely receive more than 65% of the popular vote, these resolutions are passing by 65, 75, and 85 percent. Similar referenda have passed with strong majorities in 96 other Wisconsin communities in recent years. Clearly, the desire to get big money out of politics is uniting people across party lines. For those looking to pin down the political zeitgeist of the 2016 election, this is it: Americans want fundamental reform of how politics and elections are run in this country.

I'll be the first to acknowledge that this is a tough issue for a member of Congress to embrace. “Without the big dollars,” electeds rightfully wonder, how will I finance my campaign?” A winning U.S. House campaign costs millions of dollars; a U.S. Senate campaign tens of millions. But the point is that campaigns don't need to cost that much. Campaign spending has skyrocketed since *Citizens United* because each candidate needs to defend against the big money attacks of his or her opponents. End the unlimited and unaccountable spending, and costs will go down for everyone. Citizens can run for Congress without having to amass enormous sums, and Members of Congress can spend their time in office doing the will of the people, rather than fundraising for the next election.

This year marks the first time since the *Citizens United* decision that the same party has controlled the House, the Senate, and the Presidency. That means: no more excuses about partisan gridlock. The same voters who went to the polls for President Trump and Republican majorities in Congress also voted overwhelmingly to say that corporations and unions are not people, and money is not speech. Rural America: you spoke in 2016. Now in the New Year, let's make sure that Congress is listening.

*Kara O'Connor lives in Madison and is Government Relations Director for Wisconsin Farmers Union, a member-driven organization, is committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities, and all people through educational opportunities, cooperative endeavors, and civic engagement. For more information visit [www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com](http://www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com).*

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