



MONEY IS NOT SPEECH. Across from Pioneer Courthouse in Portland, about 150 gathered on a rainy Friday Jan. 20 to protest corporate money in politics. Two years prior, a 5-4 majority of the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that corporate political spending is protected by the First Amendment. (Photo by Jessika Brandt)

Citizens United gives rise to a citizens movement

Up to 80 percent of Americans oppose the Supreme Court decision.

By **DON McINTOSH**
Associate Editor

Two years after the U.S. Supreme Court took the lid off, corporate money in politics is surging, but so is a citizens movement to counteract it.

On Jan. 21, 2010, the Supreme Court struck down limits on independent corporate (and union) political spending — in a case called *Citizens United vs. FEC*. The decision provoked an immediate reaction, with polls showing two weeks later that 80 percent of Americans opposed the ruling. Though *Citizens United* also removed restrictions on independent political spending by unions, AFL-CIO president Rich Trumka condemned the decision for further tilting the playing field in favor of corporations.

But since Occupy Wall Street appeared in late 2011, a counter-movement has gained traction, declaring that money is not speech, and corporations are not people.

On Jan. 18 the national public interest group Common Cause launched Amend 2012, an online campaign calling for a constitutional amendment to overturn *Citizens United*. A two-minute video from former U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich makes their case.

And on the eve of the decision's second anniversary, a group called Move to Amend — formed to overturn *Citizens United* — held rallies Jan. 20 at federal courthouses in 130 cities, including Portland.

"*Citizens United* is one more step for corporations to be able to dominate elections," says David Delk, an Executive Board member of AFSCME Local

3135 in Portland. Delk works for a public housing agency, enforcing requirements that contractors doing work for the agency pay their workers the prevailing wage. But in his free time for the past 15 years, he's led a local chapter of the grassroots group Alliance for Democracy, whose purpose is to end corporate dominance of politics and the economy. It's a big task, Delk admits, and it starts with education.

Most people — real people — don't think of corporations as persons. But the idea dates back to 1886, when the U.S. Supreme Court decided in *Santa Clara vs. Southern Pacific Railroad* that the word "person" in the 14th Amendment could refer to corporations.

Now, a growing number of municipalities are calling for a constitutional amendment to eliminate "corporate personhood" by clarifying that Constitutional rights are for people, not for corporations.

When the question goes before voters, it appears to be a no-brainer: Measures calling for a constitutional amendment to clarify that corporations don't have the same rights as citizens passed last year by 75 percent in Missoula, Montana; 74 percent in Boulder, Colorado; 84 percent in Madison, Wisconsin; and 78 percent in Dane County, Wisconsin.

City councils have followed suit. Duluth, Minnesota and Los Angeles, California passed resolutions in December. The New York City Council passed one Jan. 4.

Portland passed its version Jan. 12, sponsored by Mayor Sam Adams. It directs the City's federal lobbyist to call for a constitutional amendment to reverse the impact of *Citizens United*. [It passed 3-0; Commissioners Dan Saltzman and Nick Fish were absent.]

"Corporations are not people, they are legal entities created by our laws to

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