



AMERICAN PROMISE

Action Sheet for November 2018

The End of Midterms Is Not the End of Our Work as Citizens

Summary: Our action this month is focused writing letters to the editor, inviting people to stay engaged, even after midterm elections. Civic participation tends to dwindle after the midterm elections, but through your letters to the editor, you can remind your community that our job as citizens doesn't end after Election Day, and joining an American Promise Association is a great way to support continued civic engagement. It's up to us to encourage community members to continue advocating for a democracy that represents people, not money.

The Problem:

Money isn't speech; it's power. Supreme Court decisions such as *Buckley v. Valeo* and *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* created radical new "free speech rights" for corporations, unions and special interests at the expense of the rights of all Americans and the interests of the country. The concentrated financial influence of special interests in our politics is the number one problem our nation faces, and the survival of American democracy is in jeopardy if we fail to act. The 28th Amendment is more urgent than ever. The Supreme Court won't fix its catastrophic mistake, so it's up to the people to ensure that our elected representatives fix it.

We have been living through a decades-long trend where global corporations and special interests have been gaining "super-citizen" status. *Citizens United v. FEC* is a 2010 Supreme Court ruling that says: 1) corporations have the same rights as humans, 2) limitless political spending is the same as free speech, and 3) Americans cannot set limits on political spending.

The *Citizens United* decision has fueled elections dominated by record-breaking spending by Super PACs and unaccountable outside groups funded by corporations and a tiny, extraordinarily wealthy sliver of the American public. In 2012, the first presidential election cycle after *Citizens United*, 3,318 donors, amounting to less than .01 percent of the U.S. population, accounted for 93 percent of Super PAC funding.

Laser Talk: Eight out of 10 Americans agree that our political system is out of control. Billions of dollars are pouring into campaigns from corporations, unions and the wealthy. A 28th amendment would overturn the 2010 *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision which gave

human constitutional rights to corporations and struck down laws that provided limits on campaign spending with increasingly frightening consequences. Here are a few examples:

- When Wall Street firms buy politicians, and financial corruption brings our economy to the brink, too many citizens lose their jobs, homes, and life savings and Wall Street goes unpunished.
- When millions of political campaign dollars flow across state lines anonymously, state's rights are infringed and transparency is sold away.
- Special interests do not pour excess sums of money into political campaigns just for the sake of it – they expect favors returned, which they receive.
- Americans see the urgency of passing a 28th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which would allow us to place reasonable limits on campaign contributions and reserve human liberties for people, not corporations.

Write a Letter to the Editor:

1. Find the local newspaper you will write and learn what is required for letters to the editor, Google the following: “(Name of the paper) letters to the editor submission criteria.” Note the number of words they allow and how a letter is submitted (Do you submit it on the newspaper's website or do they provide an e-mail address to use).
2. If you are writing a letter to a larger newspaper, find an article or editorial that provides a good angle for inviting people to consider that our job as citizens doesn't end on election day and that participation in a local American Promise chapter is a great way to continue making our voices heard. (e.g. I read with interest the article on the 4.5 million dollars spent by my US Senate candidates and was appalled that this is one of the most expensive senate races in my state's history) If you are writing a smaller local paper, you don't have to reference an article, just write it in a way that makes it clear why local readers would be interested in and care about this issue. (e.g. In such a heated political environment, residents of _____ are more likely to be interested in learning what we can do to get the corrosive influence of money out of our political system.)
3. In your letter, include a way for interested community members to contact you or your APA.
4. Next, find a few published letters to the editor in the newspaper you are writing to see how they are started and the general tone.
5. Write your letter using the guidelines the newspaper has provided. Share what values or experiences move you to work to have a government run by people not money. Refer to the laser talk for other ideas.
6. If your letter is published, be sure to a) post it on social media, send it to your elected officials, and let us know! Go to connect.americanpromise.net and on the 'Action Center' drop down menu, you will see the "Citizen Uprising Action Reporting Forms" option. Use the proper reporting form to let us know about your published LTE.
7. Celebrate! You're on the path to creating champions in Congress, the media and the general public for a 28th amendment!

Training: Setting up Google Alerts for Keywords in Local Newspapers

Here's how to do it:

1. Create a list of the web addresses (URLs) of all the newspapers you're targeting
2. Go to <http://www.google.com/alerts> (you'll need to be logged in to a Google account for this to work)
3. Click "Create an alert about..." Phrases you might consider: 'citizens united', 'corruption', 'opioid crisis', 'SuperPAC', 'Supreme Court'.
4. In the text box, enter a string like this:

"corruption" (site:mcall.com OR site:theintell.com OR site:pennlive.com OR site:lancasteronline.com OR site:thereporteronline.com OR site:timesherald.com OR site:philly.com OR site:phillytrib.com OR site:phoenixvillenews.com OR site:pottsmmerc.com OR site:readingeagle.com OR site:dailylocal.com)

*Instead of the above URLs, you'll want to use your own list. Pay close attention to the syntax here. For each paper, use the expression: "site:" plus the domain name of the paper (i.e., the "something dot com" part). No spaces or quotation marks. Join search terms with "OR". So, like this:

site:nytimes.com OR site:washingtonpost.com OR ... etc.

*If you'd like to monitor multiple words, simply create another alert, and replicate the same format with your additional word now the one in quotations.