



END CORPORATE RULE. LEGALIZE DEMOCRACY.

MOVE TO AMEND

Move to Amend Background and Founding

Move to Amend formed out of a meeting held in San Rafael, CA at the home of Jonathan Frieman in September 2009. Participants at this original meeting were:

- Ashley Sanders, Democracy Unlimited
- Ben Manski, Liberty Tree
- David Cobb, Democracy Unlimited & Program on Corporations, Law, and Democracy
- George Friday, Independent Progressive Politics Network
- Jeff Clements, attorney
- Jim Tarbell, Alliance for Democracy
- Lisa Marie Jacobs, Ultimate Civics
- Kaitlin Sopoci-Belknap, Democracy Unlimited
- Nancy Price, Alliance for Democracy & Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
- Riki Ott, Ultimate Civics
- Shannon Biggs, Global Exchange & Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund
- Ted Nace, author

The discussion was the pending *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* Supreme Court ruling, which was expected to come down later that fall or winter.

The grassroots organizers in attendance represented organizations that had been working for the past 20+ years to educate and organize against Corporate Constitutional Rights or "Corporate Personhood". See here for a list of the founding organizations:
<http://movetoamend.org/organizations>.

Corporate Personhood is the idea created through Supreme Court doctrine that corporations have rights under the Constitution. The idea was originally created by Railroad lawyers in the late nineteenth century as a way to circumvent regulation by municipal and state governments and has been expanded through numerous Supreme Court decisions since then.

For more information about the history of these doctrines and the dangers of Corporate Personhood, see:

- [Why Abolish All Corporate Constitutional Rights?](#)
- [What Could Change if Corporate Personhood Were Abolished?](#)
- [Corporate Personhood and the "Right" to Harm the Environment](#)
- [Abolish Corporate Personhood Talk](#)

Many of the groups had signed on to an [Amicus Brief](#) authored by attorney Jeff Clements. The brief argued that not only should the Court rule against Citizens United, but they should use the opportunity presented in this case to reverse their position on corporate personhood.

The Move to Amend founders spent two days together determining whether the upcoming Supreme Court decision might represent an opportunity to expand and popularize the discussion and understanding about Corporate Personhood and the devastating impacts on our democracy. The group debated the merits of using this opportunity to call for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to clearly state that only human beings have Constitutional rights, and that money is not speech.¹

Up until this point the groups had prioritized local strategies to challenge corporate rule, such as community ordinances banning corporate ownership of water, banning corporate spending in elections, and local resolutions calling for an end to Corporate Personhood. A call for amending the Constitution would mean a departure for the primary strategy employed up to this point, but could be the opportunity to push the issue into more mainstream political discourse.

There was also extensive discussion about the need to link the new campaign to the broader nascent democracy movement, which the founding organizations see as the umbrella under which all of their work fits. As part of this context the groups also agreed to hold themselves and any future Coalition organizations to an explicit commitment to centralize anti-oppressive organizing principles.

It was determined that to successfully amend the Constitution, end corporate rule, and demand real democracy, a multi-racial and inter-generational movement must be built. Considering the history of institutionalized racism and violence used to deny most of the population human and civil rights, any discussion of the Constitution and US democracy would need to acknowledge this reality and commit to taking leadership and direction from those communities that have most been denied human rights and protection by the legal, economic and political systems of this country.

Assuming the Court's *Citizen United* decision would certainly reinforce and expand the doctrines of Corporate Personhood and Money = Speech, the group decided they would form a coalition called the "Campaign to Legalize Democracy" and launch a website with a "Motion to Amend" with background information and an online petition stating:

We, the People of the United States of America, reject the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Citizens United*, and move to amend our Constitution to:

¹ "Money = Speech is shorthand for another doctrine created by the Supreme Court. The Court determined in the 1970s that campaign spending is protected by the First Amendment and has since determined that it cannot be regulated by local, state, or federal government.

- Firmly establish that money is not speech, and that human beings, not corporations, are persons entitled to constitutional rights.
- Guarantee the right to vote and to participate, and to have our votes and participation count.
- Protect local communities, their economies, and democracies against illegitimate "preemption" actions by global, national, and state governments.

The group also prepared press materials with the goal of ensuring that the discussion following the decision would not merely focus on "campaign finance," but would include a broader debate questioning the legitimacy of the underpinnings of the Court's expected decision, in particular the idea that corporations have Constitutional rights.

Additional groups were recruited to sign on to the original "Motion to Amend," as well as 125 individual activists, scholars and journalists, including Howard Zinn, Thom Hartmann and Jim Hightower. Organizations such as Public Citizen, Common Cause, the Community Environmental Defense Fund and some others were invited to join the call so that there would be one united coalition in response to the decision, but they declined.

Citizens United v. FEC was decided on January 21, 2010, which is the date that the Move to Amend website and campaign went public. As expected, the ruling was in favor of Citizens United and was based on the doctrines of Corporate Personhood and Money=Speech. Move to Amend founders were ready with an [analysis of the decision that spoke to the underlying problem of Corporate Personhood](#) and an immediate call to amend the Constitution to overrule the Supreme Court.

The group was thrilled when many mainstream/corporate media outlets included this perspective in their reporting of the decision, and even more astounded when over 50,000 individuals signed the Motion to Amend within the first few days of the campaign. Social media was a major factor in the spread of the campaign, particularly Facebook. It also helped that Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart raised the issue up by making fun of the Court and the concept of Corporate Personhood.

Hundreds and hundreds of individuals were ready to do more than just sign the Motion to Amend -- they wanted to get to work! Move to Amend leaders recognized that their original small network of individuals and organizations needed to quickly grow into an organization that could respond to the outrage and passion people were feeling in response to the decision. The seeds they had been planting for the past 20 years with countless workshops and educational efforts were bearing fruit.

The group immediately called on people to pass resolutions in their communities calling for an amendment to overrule the Supreme Court. The resolution tactic had first been brought forth by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in a campaign they launched in 2001. Inspired by Point Arena, CA's "Resolution to End Corporate Personhood" passed in 2000,

WILPF launched a campaign calling for 50 towns and cities to pass similar measures. While only two other cities (Arcata, CA and Berkeley, CA) were able to get such a measure passed up until Move to Amend's campaign launched, Move to Amend picked up the call to use this tactic and cities began quickly passing resolutions decrying the Supreme Court.

As grassroots organizers, Move to Amend leaders were committed to building a national campaign rooted in community organizing. Municipal resolutions would be Move to Amend's core initial campaign tactic as it played to their commitment to locally based organizing. They also decided it would be critical to structure their new organization around local "Affiliates" -- grassroots Move to Amend groups that would be rooted in communities. These local groups would be the best way to build the movement to amend because they could reach Americans where they live, and could expose the aspects of corporate rule at play in each locale. The reality of corporate-owned media and attacks on internet neutrality is that face-to-face communication is still the most powerful way to build a movement.

The first year of Move to Amend these new Affiliates patiently waited as the National organization built the infrastructure to support their work. "We're building the bike as we ride it," became a common internal refrain. That didn't stop the local groups from not only passing municipal resolutions, but taking it a step further and launching ballot initiative campaigns, growing the coalition through presentations and expanding the group's reach by collecting signatures to the "Motion to Amend".

In September 2011, the National Leadership Team wrote the amendment, taking into account numerous discussions and input from the past year of organizing as Move to Amend.

That fall and winter the organization saw tremendous growth with numerous new affiliates and partners joined out of the Occupy Wall Street action that was happening at the same time. Move to Amend teamed up with dozens and dozens of Occupy groups to hold an "Occupy the Courts" action at Federal Courthouses in 43 states on January 21, 2012 -- the second "anniversary" of the *Citizens United* decision.

The amendment was officially named, the [We the People Amendment](#) in the spring of 2012, through a survey of names offered by Move to Amend supporters with the final name selected by Move to Amend affiliates. It was introduced in the 113th Congress in the House of Representatives in February 2013, by lead sponsor Rick Nolan (MN-DFL).

In 2014 the organization underwent a year-long internal discussion and study group, called the [Movement Education Program](#), in an effort to develop a shared analysis and language for how to effectively build an organization that centralizes anti-oppression in order to build a multi-racial, multi-generational mass movement capable of amending the Constitution.

Based on participant feedback it was determined this would become an ongoing program of the organization and a requirement for local and national members of the organization.

In 2014 Move to Amend also launched “Pledge to Amend” to get candidates to pledge support for the amendment if elected to office. 259 candidates participated in the initial effort.

- For a current list of resolutions passed and in progress, see: <https://movetoamend.org/resolutions-map>
- For a current list of elected officials who have taken the Pledge to Amend, see: <https://movetoamend.org/pledge-amend-respondents>
- For a current list of Move to Amend affiliates, see: <https://movetoamend.org/affiliates-list>