

Money in Politics-The April Forum

Our April forum was all it promised to be in defining the critical issue of campaign financing and sparking action. Our member Theresa Martin also doubles as a reporter and covered the Forum for the internet newspaper Cape Cod Today. We thank her for this great coverage. A link to the full article is attached to this email. We are printing here a few highlights:

“The forum focused on what has happened and how we can respond to the influx of money into the political process triggered by the Citizens United Supreme court decision, and touched on topics ranging from corporate governance to term limits. The 2010 Citizens United Supreme Court decision gave the nod to political spending by corporations, unions, and other organizations, saying that paid political spending by these entities constituted a form of First Amendment-protected free speech- and that the corporations have the same constitutional rights as people.

“Slavery is the legal fiction that a Person is Property. Corporate personhood is the legal fiction that Property is a Person” said panelist Mary Zepernick, starting off the debate of the morning. “Corporations are not people and money is not speech” she said.

But the Citizen’s United decision ripped away the past several decades worth of attempts to bring balance between interests and overhaul campaign finance.

“Money and politics is not a fringe issue” said panelist Tyler Creighton, assistant director of Massachusetts Common Cause, explaining that it needs to be a top priority because all other issues hinge on Congress making decisions based on the merits or on the public will – not on who wrote the biggest check or had hundreds of lobbyists deployed.

“Citizens United is really a symptom of a longer term issue, “Sen. Wolf said, challenging attendees to imagine how it would be if the first goal of the food industry...The goals and structure of many corporations reflect shareholder value, profit, and returns. In contrast, government is the civic expression of our collective will. Citizens United is an insult to that,” he added with emphasis.

Panelist Wolf publicly switched hats and put on his Cape Air CEO cap to point out that profit is not a dirty word, and that we should start by looking at changes that can happen within the existing structures. Instead of weakening corporations, the panel as a whole suggested strengthening government - or at least letting government do what it is already empowered to do. Common Cause’s Creighton pointed to the fertilizer plant explosion that decimated a Texas town this week as an example where a “defanged” agency lacked the power to prevent the disaster. The session wrapped up with questions about what people can do at a local level to

press the issue. Some ideas:

-Massachusetts has disclosure legislation proposed to close the Citizen's United loopholes –work to help it pass.

-Support efforts to repeal Citizens United through local referendums.

-Talk about corporate governance. Ask for a shareholder proxy vote before a corporation spends politically.

-Support the election reforms voted for in Massachusetts but never implemented by the legislature."The Cape Cod Voter Vol.53 Issue 9