

# Our Voices, Our Democracy

Victories Since *Citizens United* and the Road Ahead  
Empowering Voters Over Wealthy Special Interests

Highlights from a Report Released on the Eve of the New Hampshire Primary  
online at [commoncause.org/ourvoices](http://commoncause.org/ourvoices)  
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## 2016: National Strategy Emerges from State-by-State Wins

- **The National Conversation Begins: President Obama Takes up Democracy Reform:** Saying that it is “not only important who we elect, but how we elect them,” President Obama used the final passage of his last State of the Union address to acknowledge regret at his inability to resolve the rancor in Washington. Citing many challenges our democracy faces, he called the nation to a “Better Politics” and pledged to travel the country in support of democracy reform throughout the last year of his presidency. What appears to be the last new major issue his administration is likely to initiate, the President will begin this series of events on February 10, 2016. in Springfield, Illinois, where he announced his candidacy in 2007.
- **The People’s Priority Issue: Money in Politics Heats Up the 2016 Race:** The issue of money in politics and who the government truly works for has been injected in the presidential race, leading to candidates from both sides of the aisle proposing campaign finance, ethics, and election solutions.
- **Expanding the Map: Statewide Ballot Initiatives in 2016.** The 2016 election will likely see a record number of ballot initiatives on money in politics reform, including possible statewide initiatives in CA, MO, OR, SD, and WA, along with several ballot measures at the municipal level as Americans tire of waiting for Congress that can tackle big issues again and work together to do what they can until the politicians catch up.
- **It’s About Democracy, Not Party: State/City Legislatures in 2016:** Legislative efforts in several states and city councils are increasing though many are just starting the process and won’t see votes in this session, some politicians are reluctant to change the system that elected them. Of particular note are growing numbers of Republicans supporting reform efforts, debunking the myth democracy reform is a partisan issue. The truth is there is resistance to change in both parties from people thinking voters don’t really care about “process issues” and deny the growing national movement because their power is premised money, not people.
- **Three Major April Events, One Democracy: Of, By, and For the People:** Two large scale demonstrations known as Democracy Spring and Democracy Awakening will take place in April, bringing together Americans from all across the country to register their belief it is time for fundamental change that puts a check on Big Money and restores balance to our democracy. A third major event in conjunction with these two is the Congress of Conscience, emphasizing the power vested in the people as the ultimate check and balance to every elected official, the right to vote. Threatened by regressive legislation in recent years erecting unnecessary obstacles to registration and voting, more and more Americans believe we have to take to the streets, as people did in the 60s, to secure access to the ballot and eliminate these barriers.

## Building a Movement: We’ve Been Winning Quietly Since *Citizens United*

Since *Citizens United* an unfounded cynicism has grown in the absence of accurate information about a consistent effort to fight back against Big Money that has been winning. The cynicism comes from a belief nothing can be to fight big money, that there have been no wins, no meaningful reforms, that people are not organized, or do not know which policies are effective. Our Voices, Our Democracy proves those are fictions that serve Big Money’s interest in depressing voter turnout. While congressional gridlock blocks progress on campaign finance reform at the federal level, states and municipalities across the country are winning meaningful reforms that break down barriers to participate in our democracy:

- **Restoring Balance: Voters Chip Away at Citizens United:** The day after the November 2015 election, the banner headline in the Huffington Post used the “chip away” line above as voters in **Maine** strengthened their public financing system, while **Seattle** voters approved a first in the country “Democracy Voucher” program to empower small donors. In February 2015, **Chicago** voters instructed the city council to approve a public financing system. In 2014, voters in **Tallahassee** approved a bipartisan referendum that included stricter campaign contribution limits, new ethics rules, and provided each voter with a tax rebate up to \$25 for contributions to campaigns, while **Maryland’s Montgomery County** Council unanimously enacted small donor empowerment legislation. **Connecticut’s** clean elections program remains popular and strong, and has fended off attacks to defund the system.
- **The Connecticut Model: Small Donors Change Priorities and the Face of Politics:** In places where strong campaign finance reform has been enacted, the reforms have strong support from the public and have broken down barriers of who is able to run for public office. In **Connecticut**, a 2010 poll showed 79% of Connecticut voters supported its public financing program, and the vast majority of legislators continue participate in the program. There are numerous examples of legislators being able to work more in the public interest and less beholden to special interests when it comes to policies like environmental protection and paid sick leave in municipalities and states with public financing. In 2015, Democratic leadership seeking to address budget concerns proposed cutting funding to the program. The proposal was withdrawn within 48 hours because of the swift backlash from voters, media, and legislators elected using the Citizens Election Program.
- **Dozens of States Pass Disclosure Rules:** Since *Citizens United*, at least **23 states have strengthened disclosure rules to ensure everyone’s right to know** who is trying influence our democracy. More needs to be done to establish this baseline reform that allows voters to make informed decisions.
- **Millions Demand Citizens United Be Overturned:** Since 2010, 16 states and more than 680 cities and municipalities have called on Congress to pass a constitutional amendment to overturn decisions like *Citizens United*.
- **Reformers in Republican and Democratic Parties Gain Strength:** The movement for money in politics reform is engaging people across the political and issue spectrum. Groups like Take Back Our Republic and Issue One are organizing conservatives and Republicans across the country to support money in politics reform, while the Democracy Initiative is building a coalition of labor, environmental, civil rights, and public interest groups to support key money in politics and voting campaigns.
- **The People Are Waiting for Politicians to “Get it”:** Polls show 80-90% of Americans think there is too much money in politics and want to fundamentally change or completely rebuild our system for funding campaigns. Poll after poll shows large majorities of both Democratic and Republican voters support campaign finance measures like citizen-funded election programs, disclosure and transparency rules, overturning *Citizens United* and limiting the use of Super PACs, and strong enforcement of the law. Polls at the time of the Supreme Court’s decision showed the public largely agreed that money and speech are the same thing, and corporation have the same rights as people. But as a result of the work of the advocacy community helping Americans understand the connections between money in politics and the other issues they care about, as well as experience the three most expensive elections in history, public opinion shifted dramatically, now demanding reform and very clear that money is not required for free speech, that corporations are not people, and that we the people should be able to write the common sense rules that govern how we elect our representatives.

