



LEIF NISSEN
FOUNDATION
FOR A BETTER WORLD



Defend Our Democracy Ordinance

Ordinance to Defend St. Petersburg Elections from Foreign-Influenced Corporations and Super PAC Spending

This proposed ordinance will place St. Petersburg at the forefront of the national movement to reclaim American democracy by directly challenging the U.S. Supreme Court's disastrous decision in *Citizens United v. FEC*. In order to combat the consequences of this decision—including the dominance of big money in American elections—this ordinance will accomplish the twin goals of (1) abolishing super PACs and (2) prohibiting foreign-influenced corporations from spending on city elections.

The Problem

Spending on local, state, and federal elections has skyrocketed since the 2010 *Citizens United* decision, which opened the door for corporations and unions to spend unlimited amounts of money to influence American elections. The consequences of the decision continue to poison American democracy and to reinforce the public perception that government is for sale. In the wake of *Citizens United*, we have also seen the creation of super PACs—powerful new organizations that allow wealthy funders to launder unlimited amounts of money through outside spending groups to try to dominate American elections.

The Ordinance

The ordinance has two parts:

1. *Challenging foreign-influenced corporate spending.* Federal law currently prohibits foreign governments, foreign-based companies, and people who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents from contributing or spending money in connection with any local, state, or federal election. However, as a result of *Citizens United*, nothing currently stops them from laundering money through U.S.-based corporations. This ordinance requires corporations that spend money to influence St. Petersburg elections to certify that they are *not* foreign-influenced.

2. *Abolishing super PACs.* This ordinance also sets a limit on the amount of money a wealthy funder can contribute to an outside spending group that spends money to influence St. Petersburg elections. In setting such a limit, the ordinance effectively abolishes super PAC spending in St. Petersburg elections since, by definition, super PACs are political committees able to receive donations from wealthy funders in unlimited amounts.

The ordinance has been designed to satisfy all legal requirements. However, opponents of campaign finance reform—those who support *Citizens United* and the unlimited influence of big money in elections—may challenge the ordinance in court. Free Speech For People – a national nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to restore democracy to the people – has offered to help defend the ordinance in court on a *pro bono* basis. If the Supreme Court upholds the ordinance, it would set a national precedent, which would effectively defeat *Citizens United* and end super PACs at the local, state, and federal level.

For more information, or to get involved, contact Rae Claire Johnson, American Promise Tampa Bay, at APATampaBay@gmail.com or (727) 421-8460.