

In 2016 I spoke on numerous occasions to groups and individuals as part of the successful effort to pass a referendum for an amendment to the Howard County Charter to enable the establishment of the Citizens' Election Fund, a public financing program for candidates for County Council and County Executive. I now serve on the CEF Commission, and candidates will soon be applying for participation as we approach the local elections of 2022, the first for which the program will be in effect.

I'm a big believer in public campaign financing. But until political campaigns are 100 percent publicly funded, we must continue to pursue every possible avenue toward meaningful regulation of the raising and spending of money for them. Other witnesses have detailed the consequences of the current system, fomented by the "corporations are people and money equals speech" doctrine created by Citizens United v. FEC and other Supreme Court decisions. Every member of this committee knows well its destructive, anti-democracy effects.

Other witnesses also have offered numerous citations of legal scholarship debunking the "runaway convention" myth and its dire predictions of a radical rewrite of our founding document. But if, for the sake of argument, you want to insist the nightmare scenario painted by opponents of the Democracy Amendment Resolution could still come to pass, remember that ANY amendment to the U.S. Constitution, whether it's proposed through Congress or a convention of states, must be approved by three fourths of the state legislatures. The only amendments with any realistic chance of passage will be those with wide-ranging public support across the political spectrum. The need for campaign finance reform is one of the few areas of consensus in our deeply divided political landscape. As has been noted, an overwhelming majority of Americans of all political stripes believe that money has far too much influence over our political system and is a key source of its deepening dysfunction.

The outsized influence of wealthy special interests is destroying American democracy. Why anyone would suggest that we not use every tool at our disposal – including the movement-building, bottom-up approach our founders left us in Article V – is beyond me.