



LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS
OF HAWAII

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PRESS RELEASE

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CITIZEN GROUPS SEEK TO PRESERVE FREEDOM OF DEMOCRACY

Honolulu—In light of recent U.S. and Hawaii Supreme Court rulings, Common Cause Hawaii and the League of Women Voters of Hawaii are calling on the Hawaii Legislature to pass legislation to preserve the freedom of democracy for citizens of Hawaii.

The citizen groups see an urgent need for new legislation in light of recent court decisions. The Citizens United v. FEC opinion by the U.S. Supreme Court would allow an avalanche of corporate money in elections to fund unlimited campaign advertisements. Hawaii's Tavares v. Wong ruling removes the \$1,000 aggregate limit that corporations can contribute directly to candidates, and corporations are no longer required to report the contributions they make to campaigns.

“These court rulings are dual setbacks to the integrity of our democracy and threaten to destroy the fundamental principle of free and fair elections in Hawaii,” said Nikki Love, executive director of Common Cause Hawaii. JoAnn Maruoka, of the League of Women Voters of Hawaii, said:

“Without an aggregate limit and rigorous reporting of corporate campaign expenditures, the already powerful influence of corporations and unions will be magnified.”

Both good government groups are calling on the legislature to respond to the court rulings by passing legislation in the following areas:

Corporate Contributions

Senate Bill 2918 and House Bill 2968 would require corporations to contribute to candidates only through a political action committee they establish, and allow them to transfer only \$1,000 in corporate treasury funds into their PAC. Although corporations would still be allowed to make unlimited expenditures in support of candidates, the bills would require those expenditures to be made through a PAC without coordination with a candidate. These bills must have hearings and pass the judiciary committee of each house before February 26.

Campaign Spending Reports for Special Elections

Common Cause and the League of Women Voters are also concerned that when voters cast ballots for the upcoming first congressional special election, they will not have the usually required campaign spending information of the candidates. Regular deadlines do not require campaign

donation and spending reports prior to all-mail elections, which is expected for the special election. The groups want the legislature to pass Senate Bill 2321, which would correct this problem.

Disclosure for Campaign Donations and Financial Interests

“Freedom of democracy means that citizens have equal access to policy making, influence by corporations and their lobbyists”, said Nikki Love. Because lobbyists influence public policy through campaign donations, the good government groups are seeking passage of Senate Bill 2870 and House Bill 2955 to require campaign donations to be reported on lobbyists’ reports. Some lobby groups also have business relationships with legislators, but surprisingly, legislators are not required to file these reports until after adjournment of the annual legislative session. The groups want Senate Bill 653 passed to require legislators to report their financial disclosures by the first crossover deadline for passage of bills over to the second body.

Record Retention

“In order for citizens to hold their government accountable, public access to government records is essential. Freedom of democracy cannot be realized unless citizens have free access to public records”, said JoAnn Maruoka. State law requires agencies to set schedules for the length of time documents are retained, but these retention schedules are voluntary and agencies can destroy records without consequence. Thus, Common Cause Hawaii and the League of Women Voters of Hawaii are seeking to pass Senate Bill 2309 to require mandatory compliance of retention schedules for public records.

The chief sponsor of the senate bills is Sen. Les Ihara, Jr.–D (Kaimuki, Palolo), who said: “Our freedom of democracy is in peril, unless the legislature takes steps to preserve it. The legislation proposed by good government groups must be passed to ensure free and fair elections, public ethics, and open government.”

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