



CLEVELAND HEIGHTS

Thursday, June 9, 2022 Minutes

DEMOCRACY DAY HEARING

7:00 – 8:55 p.m.

President Hart presiding

Council Members Present: Cobb, Cuda, Hart, Larson, Mattox, Moore, Russell

Also Present: Mayor Seren, Assistant Law Director Wagner

Council President Hart welcomed everyone to the Cleveland Heights City Council’s Democracy Day meeting. She stated the purpose of the meeting is to examine the impact on the City, state, and nation of political influence by corporate entities and big money in connection with the most recent election. She discussed the history of Chapter 183 of the Codified Ordinances, which was effectuated via citizen’s initiative ordinance and requires that the meeting be held annually and public comment be taken. She said there will be a written record of the evening that will be posted on the City’s website by August 1 and a letter will be sent to our elected representatives at the state and federal level. The letter will state that the citizens of Cleveland Heights voted in November 2013 in support of this citizen’s initiative calling for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution, declaring that only human beings, not corporations, are legal persons with Constitutional rights and money is not equivalent to speech. Therefore, regulating political contribution and spending does not equate to limiting political speech. She said all comments are being recorded and if people want to submit something in writing, they can do that as well. She also said Chapter 183 limits comments to five minutes to make sure everyone has a chance to speak. She asked that people limit their comments to this event and not general City business, and thanked everyone for coming.

Carla Rautenberg stated it was the first Democracy Day they’ve had during Pride Month, it’s also just ten days away from Juneteenth and it’s the first time she recalls all of Council being in attendance. She announced House Joint Resolution 48 that proposes an amendment to the Constitution of the United States providing that the rights extended by the Constitution are the rights of natural persons only has attained 94 co-sponsors in the 117th Congress, which is an all-time high. She said Marcy Kaptur and Tim Ryan are co-sponsors and they are in touch with Shontel Brown and are hopeful she will sign on soon. She then asked the first two questions of the Ohio Democracy Corporation History Quiz.

Ann Caruso discussed two bills that were introduced this year in the Ohio Legislature, S.B. 171 and H.B. 282, which would allow the sale of oil and gas waste brine from conventional drilling as a commodity. She discussed the history of Ohio using waste brine as a deicer and asked people to call their legislators in Columbus to urge them not to support the two bills.

Francis Chiappa discussed the military industrial complex, citing President Eisenhower's famous speech. He said the Pentagon's budget in 2020 was \$782 billion dollars, which was a 15% increase from 2017. U.S. military budget exceeds the total spent of the next 9 countries. He said Cleveland Peace Action and other anti-war groups have been working on these issues for decades and we are outgunned, but we must continue to say no to war.

Lois Romanoff asked two more questions from the Ohio Democracy Corporation Quiz.

Steve Sedam talked about the threat to democracy posed by private prisons and by corporate funding of members of Congress who supported the deadly January 6th coup attempt. He discussed the ways in which private prisons are not accountable to the public. He talked about two of the largest corporations operating private prisons, the GEO Group and CoreCivic, which operates two facilities in Ohio. He then talked about the many corporations who pledged to stop funding the reelection of the members of Congress who voted to not certify the election results, however, since that day, those corporations have continued to make contributions in the amount of \$16 million dollars.

Madelon Watts discussed why we need the "We the People" Amendment House Joint Resolution 48. She said many people do not realize the extent that corporations control our rights. She said in order to stop the illegitimate rights claimed by corporations, we need to reassert our sovereign legal rights as citizens by amending the U.S. Constitution. She urged everyone to get involved.

David Berenson and his daughter Zara performed a skit about corporate personhood called The Return of Ms. McGillicutty.

Maryann Barnes, the Cleveland Heights/University Heights Chair of the League of Women Voters, discussed gerrymandering in Ohio. She said despite reform referendums in recent years, the majority party was loath to give up gerrymandering. She said although we were stuck with bad maps, there will be another round of map making in 2022. She said despite the setbacks, they have not given up. She discussed some of the history of the League of Women Voter's work against gerrymandering. She then talked about other ways to combat it.

Bob Parker discussed the urgent need for expanded, improved Medicare for All. He said polls show support for universal healthcare, but political contributions have prevented serious consideration of or have actually killed Medicare for All bills.

Karen Rego is the President of Cleveland Heights Teacher Union and she discussed the significant increase in public dollars allocated to private schools. She said Ohio House Bill 583 was originally meant to address the substitute teacher shortage but she said it has been hijacked to expand vouchers. She said racial segregation has gone through the roof with vouchers, saying families that take vouchers are twice as likely to be white. She encouraged people to tour the schools so they can see what great places they are and how hard both the teachers and the students are working to survive not just the past two years but the types of red tape that are put on them due to these types of legislation.

Reverend Heidi Barham discussed stopping the slaughter of schoolchildren by enacting common sense gun laws. This is her third time speaking at this event and she said looking back at her past notes, she was overwhelmed by how much has changed but also by how things have sadly stayed the same. She said we are still fighting an uphill battle to enact common sense gun control in this country. She said it is imperative we continue to apply pressure to our elected officials to support the “We the People” Amendment and affirm that only human beings, not corporate entities, have constitutional rights and money is not speech and it can and must be regulated in political elections.

Larry Bresler talked about taxes and how corporate power hurts poor and low-wealth people. He said the tax policies promulgated through corporate powers in Ohio amplify why we have such disastrous wealth and income disparity and why corporate power hurts low wage workers in Ohio.

Steve Norris discussed democratizing money creation. He urged people to sign a petition to create a just money system at monetaryalliance.org.

Rhonda Davis-Lovejoy discussed the importance of Juneteenth. She talked about its history, saying it honors the end of slavery in the United States and it’s considered the longest running African American holiday.

Len Friedson asked two additional questions from the Ohio Democracy Corporation Quiz.

Marty Gelfand discussed money in the recent Shontel Brown/Nina Turner Congressional race. He first talked about his history of involvement in politics, then he discussed the huge sums of money spent on the Brown/Turner Congressional race. He said he is against unregulated spending and we need to go back to how things were before Citizens United.

Dave Simons, the Chair of the Ohio Sierra Club’s Energy Committee, spoke about how renewable energy development has been deliberately stifled in Ohio, damaging our economy and slowing solutions to the climate crisis.

Deborah Van Kleef discussed privatization at the municipal level. She referenced a book titled “The Fox in the Henhouse: How Privatization threatens Democracy” where the authors list 14 conclusions they’ve reached through their organizing experience and research and she discussed 6 of them.

Dean Sieck asked the final two questions of the Ohio Democracy Corporation Quiz.

Dave Lima discussed the First Energy/H.B. 6 scandal and First Energy’s subsequent political donations. He said after H.B. 6, we need to commence action to revoke First Energy’s charter.

Greg Coleridge proposed thinking of the U.S. Constitution as a box. He discussed the ways the box’s size has expanded and decreased based on the 27 Amendments and the U.S. Supreme Court’s rulings.

Councilor Larson said we need to do all we can to stop the gun lobby from profiting off of gun violence in America. She thanked all of the speakers and said their comments provided great insight into what we should care about to keep democracy alive.

Mayor Seren thanked everyone for coming to the event and keeping this on our minds and said we need to be vigilant and ensure this stay on our mind.

Councilwoman Russell said the International Day of Democracy provides the opportunity to review the state of democracy in the world, saying democracy is as much of a process as it is a goal. She said we as a people must continue to ensure government upholds the rule of law, protect and respect international standards and basic principles of legalities, and the right to ensure justice remedies and due process. She ended by quoting Abraham Lincoln and stating democracy is “of the people, by the people, and for the people” and it must not die from this earth.

Councilor Moore thanked everyone who came out and she said she recognized the heart and passion everyone put into crafting their statements.

Councilman Cuda thanked everyone for providing a night of articulate truth. He then remarked on the gun proliferation issue. He thanked people for reminding us about what’s important.

Council President Hart said we’ve heard from many that our democracy is in danger and it is. She thanked everyone for coming and sharing their thoughts and for working for a better democracy.