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Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties

*Hearing on Citizens United at 10: The Consequences for Democracy
& Potential Responses By Congress*
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My name is Carole Ortenzo, and I live in McMurray, PA, about one mile from the home of my representative, Congressman Guy Reschenthaler. I am a retired Army surgeon and had the privilege of serving and providing care for our active duty soldiers, retirees, and their dependents for 25 years.

I am also a member of American Promise, a cross-partisan non-profit organization whose goal is to have ratified a U.S. Constitutional amendment to eliminate big money in politics and, thereby, its influence over our lawmakers. Corporations, labor unions, PACs, and the very wealthy dominate political campaigns for access and influence. This unlimited and often undisclosed, or dark, money dilutes the impact of small donors and diminishes their voices and their votes.

I support HJ Res 2 and the premise of a Constitutional amendment to rectify this issue because, this way, the law could not be overturned. The amount of money being spent on campaigns is obscene and, worse yet, it continues to increase each year. Big money has been allowed to impact virtually every aspect of our government. We need to put a stop to it once and for all, and we need to make the solution permanent. Therefore, we need a U.S. Constitutional amendment.

As you are all acutely aware, one major issue for which people want real change is health care. When I served as a surgeon in the Army, our top priority at all times was patient care. Providing care for our active duty population was a given, and whether or not any of the dependents or retirees had some form of outside health insurance was a secondary consideration. Medication costs were a non-issue for our patients. Even when we required very specialized, and often expensive, medications that were not on the formulary, we found a way to procure them without burdening the patient. We took care of our patients for the love of providing patient care. What we might be paid for performing a certain surgery never entered our minds because we were paid the same regardless of the number or types of surgeries we performed. Being part of the military healthcare system was not a way to get rich. But, it *was* a way to practice medicine without the burden of wondering whether or not our patients could afford their care. Yes, we had to work within a budget. But, we also had freedom to provide high-quality health care without big-money interests trying to influence how we provided that care.

I'm sure Congressman Reschenthaler and anyone else here who served appreciates the stark difference between how the military and the civilian medical systems are run. While there are different theories about how best to address the costs of health care in the U.S., one thing is for

certain. People want change. And, if we don't end the financial influence that pharmaceutical companies and insurance companies have over our lawmakers, nothing is going to change.

Another important aspect of HJ Res 2 is that it will significantly decrease the amount of money needed to run a campaign, particularly for a contested race. As a result, lawmakers would enjoy respite from constant fundraising. Secondly, fundraising would no longer be built into lawmakers' schedules, thus allowing them more time to do the job for which they were elected. And, thirdly, eliminating big money in politics will free lawmakers from being beholden to their financial backers and voting in their best interests rather than those of their own constituents.

I can assure you that, where I live, the thought of ratifying a constitutional amendment to end big money influence in government is viewed as a monumental challenge but also something worth fighting for. Members of our community who are Republicans, Democrats, and Independents are ready to show their support. Their specific reasons may vary, but there is one we all share. We, in the swing state of PA, are sick of the perpetual political ads leading up to every general election. The candidates feel compelled to spend untold amounts of money airing these ads, and the people do not want to see them. While the TV stations profit handsomely, we mute our TVs because the ads quickly become irritating and because we don't know which ones are funded by dark money and, therefore, may be completely devoid of fact. The money spent on TV ads alone could make a significant impact if redirected to serve the people.

Another demonstration of cross-partisan support is that I have been working with my Republican state representative, Natalie Mihalek, to have a law that supports this constitutional amendment introduced in the PA House of Representatives. She told me she was stunned when she learned how much money she would have to raise for her campaign and immediately thought of all the other things that could be done with that amount of money. The Democratic Minority Leader in the PA House of Representatives has also pledged his support. Moreover, one of our Republican county commissioners, who was just elected in 2019, spoke with me on two occasions during his campaign about his support for such a constitutional amendment. Our Democratic county commissioner supports this legislation as well, and I hope to have a county resolution in favor of this bill passed in the coming months.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to present my views to this subcommittee and for moving this amendment forward. I encourage you to work together to pass this resolution and return it to the states for ratification.