



February 27, 2024

TESTIMONY | Center for Election Integrity
Support of Ohio S.B. 215
The Honorable J. Kenneth Blackwell

Chairman Rulli, Ranking Member DeMora, and Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 215, which prohibits foreign nationals from contributing to state ballot issues.

I am Ken Blackwell, the former Secretary of State of Ohio and the Chairman of the Center for Election Integrity at the America First Policy Institute. I have served as a United States Ambassador at the United Nations, and as the former Chairman of the bipartisan International Foundation for Electoral Systems.

I come here today in a bipartisan manner to say that foreign contributions in our elections are illegal and should be stopped, regardless of who does it. Such foreign intrusion erodes both our national sovereignty and the integrity of American citizenship.

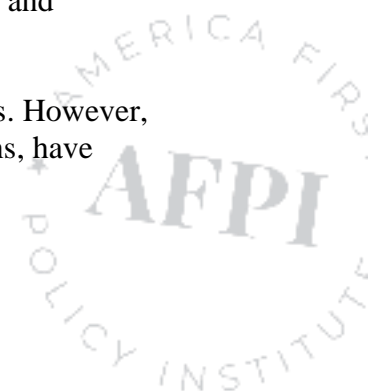
Most importantly I come to you today as a proud Ohioan who cares deeply about my state and its future. I have dedicated many years of my life to the people of both Ohio and the United States in an effort to build election systems that are fair, honest, and transparent. To that end, the good people of Ohio, and all Americans, deserve elections that are free of foreign influence.

A few weeks ago I submitted testimony to the U.S. House of Representatives discussing the dangers of allowing private money, including foreign contributions, in the administration of elections in our country. Just as we should ban foreign money from polluting the integrity of election administration, foreign money should be banned from polluting the process of ballot initiatives.

John Adams himself wrote in a letter in 1787 that “As often as Elections happen, the danger of foreign influence recurs”. Even as early as the founding of our country, the issue of foreign interference and foreign influence in elections or election processes was a significant concern.

So, you are truly upholding your duty to the Constitution and to the people you represent by proposing a law that eliminates this loophole and protects the rights of voters to fair and transparent ballot initiative processes.

Let’s be clear. Foreign nationals are prohibited from donating to political candidates. However, some of these foreign nationals, who have no interest in becoming American citizens, have devised a scheme to funnel their money to impact our elections and public policy.



The creation of domestic policy does not only come from elected leadership such as yourself, but it also comes from ballot initiatives, and this is where these foreign nationals who want to swing America in a particular direction have devised a scheme to get around campaign finance laws by using C4 organizations.

One of the primary examples of this concerns Mr. Hansjorg Wyss, who has stated his intent in donating millions of dollars to partisan organizations. He already has donated a quarter of a billion dollars to the Sixteen Thirty Fund, a well-known partisan organization that is subsidizing ballots initiatives in Ohio and around the country.

This fight to stop this influence of foreign money is bigger than any one ballot issue. It is to protect the integrity of our elections. It is to stop people who are not American citizens from funding surrogates and Trojan horses to change the Ohio Constitution.

And this fight is not about left or right, red or blue. It's about what is right and what is wrong....and foreign nationals being able to bypass American laws to influence elections that can determine our course as a state is wrong...and it should be stopped, regardless of who is doing it.

This bill would close this loophole. But we all know it will not be the end of the fight. We need to continue to be vigilant because these foreign interests will find more loopholes, and when they do, we need to close them like you are discussing here today. That's our job. To protect the voters and the elections of Ohio from these foreign interests.

The people of Ohio deserve better than to have foreign money dictating domestic policy, especially when it is laundered through partisan organizations. I urge the passage of this legislation.

Thank you for your time.

