



ELECTION
TRANSPARENCY
INITIATIVE



May 29, 2024

The Honorable Jason Stephens
Speaker of the Ohio House of
Representatives
77 South High Street, Floor 14
Columbus, OH 43215

The Honorable Matt Huffman
President of the Ohio Senate
1 Capitol Square, 2nd Floor, SH-201
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Speaker Stephens and President Huffman,

American elections should be free from foreign interference. Yet, a loophole in Ohio law is currently exposing the Buckeye State to millions of dollars in political spending tied to foreign nationals. Last week, Governor Mike DeWine called a special session to ban foreign influence in state ballot issues and ensure that President Biden is on Ohio's ballot. Yesterday, he redoubled his call to ban foreign interference in Ohio elections, and we agree. Our organizations call for immediate passage of a strong ban on foreign funding for state ballot issues during this special session.

This is an urgent matter. For decades, it has been illegal for foreign nationals to donate to political candidates. However, no federal or Ohio law applies the same ban to ballot issues. This loophole is being actively exploited in Ohio and throughout the country.

The Sixteen Thirty Fund, a Washington D.C. nonprofit, has received at least \$243 million from Swiss billionaire Hansjorg Wyss. Sixteen Thirty Fund has then turned around and spent nearly \$100 million on state ballot issues across 25 states. In Ohio alone, Sixteen Thirty Fund and their foreign-tied cash have spent nearly \$15 million on state ballot issues—influencing voters as they make historic decisions that rewrite this state's constitution.

We applaud the Ohio Senate for passing strong legislation to protect Ohio elections from the growing threat of foreign interference and call on House and Senate leaders to finish the task. To be effective, a final package must at minimum tackle three core issues: It must shut down direct and indirect contributions from foreign nationals, must ban the spending, including independent expenditures, of funds tied to foreign nationals, and must ensure independent investigatory and enforcement power by the Attorney General.

Mr. Wyss and the Sixteen Thirty Fund have shown how easily foreign special interests can influence campaigns that affect the very heart of this state's democracy. There is no reason agents working for China, Russia, or other hostile foreign powers could not do the same. Moreover, it is clear from the sharp objections of certain elected officials and activist groups that more foreign spending is planned to influence major ballot issues this year. There is simply no time to waste.

With another election upon us, the legislature has a clear duty to protect the integrity of Ohio's democracy against foreign interference. The nation is watching, and the people of Ohio are counting on you.

Respectfully,

Jason Snead

Executive Director
Honest Elections Project Action

Hon. Kenneth Blackwell

Former Ohio Secretary of State
Chair, Center for Election Integrity
America First Policy Institute

Caitlin Sutherland

Executive Director
Americans for Public Trust

Catherine Gunsalus

Director of State Advocacy
Heritage Action for America

Hon. Kenneth T. Cuccinelli, II

Former Virginia Attorney General
National Chairman
Election Transparency Initiative

Bob Carlstrom

President
AMAC Action