



MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM

BILL NUMBER: HB 793		DATE: 2/25/2025	
COMMITTEE: Elections			
TESTIFYING: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES			
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WITNESS NAME			
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WITNESS NAME: ARNIE C. AC "HONEST ABE" DIENOFF		PHONE NUMBER:	
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Election integrity is one of the Freedom Principle MO's top legislative priorities. We know the importance of protecting our Republic and our Constitutional rights depend on having free and just as importantly fair elections. We have seen the influence of foreign money on many campaign issues in Missouri. Groups like the Sixteen Thirty Fund spent millions of dollars working to influence voters to support Amendment 3. The George Soros Open-Source Fund, donated more than \$2 million to pass Proposition A. We have learned Hansjorg Wyss, a Swiss billionaire and not a U.S. citizen has contributed around a quarter of a billion dollars to the Sixteen Thirty Funds, and the Sixteen Thirty Funds filters that down to states to influence ballot initiatives. According to its founding document, the Sixteen Thirty Fund was created with seed funding from America United for Change, ACORN, USAction, the Sierra Club, and Working America. These dark money groups do not support the values of America or Missouri. The Freedom Principle MO was the key grassroots group pushing for the passage of Amendment 7 in the 2024 elections. This amendment banned the disastrous rank-choice voting, but it also banned foreign interference in Missouri elections. While Amendment 7 prohibits foreign interference in our elections, HB 793 adds teeth to this provision and creates the requirements for organizations to declare they have not received any funds directly or indirectly from foreign sources. We are sure the dark money groups will try and find creative ways to get around these provisions, but what this does is give citizens the ability to follow the money and it gives the Missouri Ethics Commission the ability to investigate complaints of violations and if the MEC does find a group has violated this law, it holds these dark money groups accountable for their actions.



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Chairman Reedy and Members of the Committee: My name is Caitlin Sutherland and I am the founding Executive Director of Americans for Public Trust, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that works to uncover and publicize outside money and influence in politics and policy, including tracing foreign dark money. I thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 793 to ban foreign nationals from contributing to ballot measure campaigns. This legislation is crucial to enact, especially since Missouri has seen \$13 million in foreign-tied spending influencing your state ballot measures, and I applaud Representative Baker for taking action. While Missouri and federal law already prohibit foreign nationals from influencing elections, the laws are not nearly strong enough. This leaves many loopholes in place that foreign nationals can exploit and still have their money flow into politics. Without strengthening these statutes, foreign money can and is flowing into your state. Earlier this month, important tax records were released that show a Swiss billionaire named Hansjörg Wyss funneled nearly \$59 million in grants in a single year to liberal dark money groups, including an eight-figure donation to a Washington, D.C.-based group called the Sixteen Thirty Fund. Mr. Wyss is not a U.S. citizen, but his goal is to "(re)interpret the American Constitution in the light of progressive politics." According to the New York Times, Mr. Wyss' "political activism is channeled through a daisy chain of opaque organizations that mask the ultimate recipients of his money." One of those opaque organizations, the Sixteen Thirty Fund, is the largest beneficiary of Mr. Wyss' foreign money, receiving almost \$280 million over many years. After receiving his foreign cash, Sixteen Thirty Fund has turned around and poured \$130 million into ballot issue campaigns in 25 states, including Missouri. The Sixteen Thirty Fund and their foreign money has been bankrolling ballot measures in the Show Me State for years. In 2018, they contributed \$4.8 million to a campaign to raise the state's minimum wage, making them the single largest donor. Just last year, when another initiative to raise the state's minimum wage and mandate paid sick leave made the ballot, Sixteen Thirty Fund was again the number one donor to the campaign – contributing \$3.6 million to the effort. Also last year, they dumped over \$4.6 million into the campaign to enshrine abortion rights in your state's constitution, making them the number one donor to that group as well. That's a grand total of \$13 million in foreign-backed spending to influence your state's policies and constitution. We must also remember that as Mr. Wyss' money flows through the Sixteen Thirty Fund, there is absolutely nothing stopping China or Qatar from taking advantage of these foreign influence loopholes. I urge you to work to strength the laws regarding foreign nationals influencing ballot measures, and encourage you to support House Bill 793. Thank you.



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WITNESS NAME			
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WITNESS NAME: CATHLEEN PROTTE		PHONE NUMBER:	
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Chairman Reedy and Members of the Committee, My name is Chandra Hendren and I represent Heritage Action for America, a grassroots organization with over two million grassroots activists nationwide, including over a thousand Missourians. Heritage Action urges the House Elections Committee to support HB 793. HB 793's purpose is to ensure Missouri's elections are free from the corrupting influence of foreign funding by prohibiting foreign contributions to Missouri ballot issue campaigns and ensuring the laws for ballot issue campaigns are consistent with existing state law banning foreign national contributions to candidates and political committees. The U.S. federal government already limits the participation of foreign individuals, entities, and governments in national political campaigns, and states should take equal precautions to protect their citizens from foreign interests that do not align with those of our state. Missouri must ensure that its citizens' voices are not diluted, and decisions about Missouri's Constitution and laws are based on the voices of its citizens – not foreign billionaires. Sadly, foreign meddling in the U.S. political landscape is not a hypothetical problem and Missouri is also not alone in its endeavor to push back. In 2024, Ohio enacted legislation prohibiting direct and indirect foreign contributions for ballot measures. As of today, several other states across the country are taking initiative to protect their state elections from foreign funding by introducing and passing similar legislation. Heritage Action asks you to SUPPORT HB 793. Thank you for your time and attention on this important issue.



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Chairman Reedy, Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today in support of House Bill 793. My name is Jason Snead, executive director of Honest Elections Project Action, a nonprofit group dedicated to preserving free and fair elections. House Bill 793 is a straightforward measure to ban foreign funding in state ballot measure campaigns. This is no hypothetical concern. In states across the country, including here in Missouri, millions of dollars in foreign-tied funds have been spent to influence the outcome of state ballot measures. This torrent of funding is tied to a Swiss billionaire activist named Hansjorg Wyss. As the watchdog group Americans for Public Trust points out, Wyss has put approximately \$280 million into a left-wing group called the Sixteen Thirty Fund, which in turn has spent a staggering \$130 million driving ballot measures to promote abortion and rewrite election laws for partisan political gain, or to defeat measures referred to the voters by state legislatures. Missouri is one of the top targets for this foreign-funded blitz. Fully one-tenth of Sixteen Thirty Fund's total ballot measure spending—approximately \$13 million—has been directed at your state. In fact, only three states have seen more foreign-tied money dumped into their ballot measures. Last year alone, the Sixteen Thirty Fund spent roughly \$8 million in Missouri, more than half of which went to enshrine abortion in the state's constitution. Decisions as significant as amending the constitution belong exclusively in the hands of the citizens of this country and the voters of this state. Foreign nationals have no business influencing ballot measures, and these campaigns should not be allowed to serve as a Trojan Horse for foreign interference in the American democratic process. Unfortunately, that is precisely what the ballot measure process has become. Federal law has long banned foreign nationals from donating to candidates and super PACs, but that prohibition does not extend to ballot measures, including legislative referrals. And as the Sixteen Thirty Fund has shown, it is alarmingly easy to exploit this loophole and launder foreign money into ballot measure contests through intermediary groups. In fact, there is no reason to believe that Sixteen Thirty Fund is alone in this. Recent reporting has revealed that money tied to China is flowing into U.S. environmental nonprofits, a pattern of giving very similar to Wyss and the Sixteen Thirty Fund. It is time to close the foreign funding loophole. To be effective, legislation banning foreign funding for ballot measures should do four things. First, states must ban both direct and indirect foreign contributions to ballot measure campaigns. Wyss and the Sixteen Thirty Fund have shown how easy it is for a foreign national to launder his funding through third party groups. Moreover, an effective ban should be designed to prevent groups from laundering large sums of foreign money into campaigns by accepting and using foreign donations for other purposes that free up resources for ballot measure contributions. A clear way to accomplish this is to require donors certify they have not received more than a specified amount of foreign funding over a time period prior to the contribution (such as \$100,000 over a four-year period). Second, the same protections mentioned above must be applied to

independent expenditure campaigns, as well. It does little good to institute a ban if foreign nationals and foreign-financed organizations can simply pivot their funding into an independent expenditure campaign instead. Third, the ban must apply to foreign nationals. Many existing state laws against foreign funding for state candidates apply only to foreign governments or political parties. Foreign influence over the ballot measure process is toxic no matter whether it originates from a hostile foreign power or an activist billionaire like Hansjorg Wyss. Finally, it is important to protect the privacy rights of American donors. Cutting foreign influence out of the ballot measure process is not, and should never be, an excuse to limit the free speech rights of American citizens. The intent is to protect the democratic process, not weaken it by exposing Americans who wish to engage in lawful First Amendment speech while remaining anonymous. HB 793 would make great strides towards safeguarding the integrity of Missouri's elections against foreign influence. Thank you for considering this testimony.



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HB 793 would ban foreign funding and involvement in state ballot measures. The Founding Fathers of the United States warned of foreign manipulation as a corrupting force in politics and government. For example, President George Washington, in his Farewell Address to the American people in 1796, warned of foreign powers which “practice the arts of seduction, to mislead public opinion ... Against the insidious wiles of foreign influence ... a free people ought to be constantly awake, since history and experience prove that foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of republican government.” And President John Adams, in his Inaugural Speech to the American people in 1797, warned of being “unfaithful to ourselves if we should ever lose sight of the danger to our liberties if anything partial or extraneous should infect the purity of our free, fair, virtuous, and independent elections.” Adams noted specifically that through interference “by foreign nations by flattery or menaces, by fraud or violence, by terror, intrigue, or venality, the Government may not be the choice of the American people, but of foreign nations. It may be foreign nations who govern us, and not we, the people, who govern ourselves.” Restrictions on foreign election spending or interference of any kind are necessary to secure our borders and, even as the Biden Administration noted: “Just as we defend democracy around the world, the U.S. government is working to keep American democracy safe from foreign adversaries. [We must] curb the ability of foreign entities and special interests to use dark money loopholes to influence our elections.” Federal law (52 U.S. Code § 30121) prohibits a foreign national from (among other things) “directly or indirectly [making] a contribution or donation of money or other thing of value, or to make an express or implied promise to make a contribution or donation, in connection with a Federal, State, or local election.” However, the Federal Election Commission in 2021 interpreted this law to not ban foreign funding of ballot measures and has urged Congress to pass a law to close the foreign money loophole. In the 2024 general election, both Amendment 3 (legalized abortion throughout all nine months of pregnancy) and Proposition A (minimum wage/sick leave) received significant financial support from the dark-money Sixteen Thirty Fund and one of its most significant backers: Swiss billionaire Hansjörg Wyss. According to Americans for Public Trust: “During the 2024 election cycle, Sixteen Thirty Fund spent over \$37 million in foreign-backed cash targeting ballot issues in Alaska, Arizona, Florida, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, and Ohio.” Americans for Public Trust found that in Missouri, as of October 2024, Sixteen Thirty Fund and its foreign backers dumped \$4.5 million in support of Amendment 3 and \$3.5 million for Proposition A. A 2022 University of Maryland poll found that nearly 80% of U.S. voters support prohibiting foreign entities from funding ballot measures: 77% of Republicans, 84% of Democrats and 74% of Independents. According to Ballotpedia, nine states have enacted laws banning foreign nationals or governments from contributing to ballot measure campaigns: California, Colorado, Maine, Maryland, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Washington. We urge the House Elections Committee to

vote “do pass” on HB 793 so Missouri can be the tenth state to protect our ballot measures from foreign interference.



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WITNESS NAME			
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