

Minnesota House of Representatives

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Michael Howard, (612) 207-7396

February 4, 2016

House DFL Legislators propose constitutional amendment to shed light on dark money spent in Minnesota elections

“DISCLOSE Act” would allow voters to decide if they have right to know who is spending money to influence their vote

SAINT PAUL, MINN – Since the Supreme Court’s decision in Citizens United v FEC, Minnesotans have been inundated by untold sums of outside spending in campaigns – spending that is clearly intended to influence their vote but that is not disclosed publicly. Today, House DFLers unveiled the “Minnesota DISCLOSE (Democracy is Strengthened by Casting Light on Spending in Elections) Act,” a constitutional amendment that would reform the state’s campaign finance system by shining a light on the dark money spent in elections, guaranteeing voters a right to know who is paying to influence their vote.

“Millions of dollars in campaign spending by special interest groups are drowning out the voices of ordinary Minnesotans who increasingly feel like their voice and their vote doesn’t matter. No wonder our economy is not working as it should be for ordinary families,” said House DFL Leader Paul Thissen. “It’s time for politicians to stop blocking common sense reforms and give Minnesota voters the opportunity to decide for themselves if they have a right to know who is spending money to influence their vote.”

The Minnesota DISCLOSE Act aims to eliminate a campaign finance loophole that currently exempts certain political groups from reporting spending on “issue based” communications, even if they advocate for or against a candidate with close proximity to an election. As an example, the Minnesota Jobs Coalition sent dozens of mailers in a handful of competitive legislative districts in support of Republican candidates, but do not have to report how much they are spending on those mailers or who is funding them.

Former Representative Ryan Winkler authored legislation last year to address this issue statutorily but House Republicans blocked its passage at every turn. House DFL legislators said they are bringing forward a constitutional amendment to give voters the opportunity to weigh in on an issue vital to Minnesota’s democratic process.

“The voters I talk to in my district – Democrats, Republicans and independents alike – are fed up with the amount of money pouring into legislative races from secretive outside groups,” said State Rep. Laurie Halverson (DFL – Eagan), the chief author of the Minnesota DISCLOSE Act. “While we can’t stop that spending, we should at least give voters more information about who is spending the money and how much they’re spending trying to influence their vote. The DISCLOSE Act is about giving more power to Minnesota voters who are frustrated by an election system that seems rigged against them.”

Article VII Section 9 of the Minnesota Constitution currently states that, “The legislature shall provide by law for disclosure of contributions and expenditures made to support or oppose candidates for state elective offices.” That was written long before Citizens United, at a time where there was no such thing as 527s or Super PACs. The Minnesota DISCLOSE Act would give voters the opportunity to update Minnesota’s constitution to match today’s realities.

If approved, the constitutional amendment question on the ballot would read:

"Shall the Minnesota Constitution be amended to require public disclosure of contributions and expenditures made for communications that expressly advocate for or against a candidate for state elected office, or which could be interpreted by a reasonable person as advocating the election or defeat of a candidate for state elected office?"

House Democrats said they will urge passage of the DISCLOSE Act this session so that it could be placed on the 2016 ballot.

###