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## Special interests fuel 60%drive

There's a lot of debate at the Statehouse over the 100-year-old law giving Ohioans the freedom to amend our sacred Ohio Constitution. With the help of out-of-state interest groups, like Save Our Constitution PAC, my Republican colleagues are publishing op-eds in newspapers everywhere, including this one, to influence public opinion on their proposals (House Joint Resolution 1 and Senate Joint Resolution 2). Their proposals make it harder for citizens to get their amendment ideas on the ballot and raise the voter approval threshold for those ideas from the majority of Ohioans (50% +1) to a supermajority (60%).

Why do they want these unpopular and unfair changes? Allegedly, to protect the Constitution from 'special interest groups' with 'personal agendas'. Just turn your TV on to see the irony here. We're being flooded with attack ads. Who's buying these commercials? Who's pushing to dilute our freedom and the voice of Ohioans?

Special interest groups with personal agendas.

In [a secret memo to fellow Republicans](#), the proposal's sponsor said 60% was needed to stop abortion rights and redistricting for fair maps, both popular, citizen-led amendment initiatives that are underway or will be soon. They've introduced House Bill 144 and Senate Bill 92 to force a \$20-million August special election to approve their 60% proposal, just in time to thwart these same initiatives. The jiggling from Governor DeWine, Secretary of State LaRose, and Republican lawmakers' on their August special election position, voting only months ago to abolish them for being '[undemocratic](#)' and '[bad for taxpayers](#)', is so fast and out-of-tune, even my Irish step dancing kids can't keep up.

It's revealing who appears in Columbus to support taking away Ohioans ability to self-govern. Its outside interest groups, of course, including those based in Florida. Weirdly, [they're not mentioning the sanctity of the Constitution](#). They just don't want certain rights or ideas enshrined in it like women's reproductive rights, gun control, and abolishing slavery. [Yes, slavery](#). Do I spy a 'personal agenda'?

But I know that the people in the Mahoning Valley are too smart for their double-talk. I've seen our neighbors flex their muscles as recently as April during our Regional Chamber's annual drive-in event. When the Ohio Senate president addressed our business and community leaders during their visit to the Statehouse, he didn't say how we can better ensure good paying jobs and economic opportunity. Instead, he grandstanded about HJR 1 and SJR 2. He made it clear, as he begged for their support, that his 'personal agenda' was stopping minimum wage initiatives. The Mahoning Valley was quick to question the need for a \$20-million August special election, asking why it couldn't wait until November. You can't pull the wool over our eyes, even though they keep trying with non-Ohioans' help.

Meet **Illinois** billionaire Richard Uihlein. He [gave roughly \\$1.1 million to the Save Our Constitution PAC](#). He's the PAC's sole benefactor. Surprise, the PAC's ads you see aren't calling for 'constitutional protection'. They're rallying for more political polarization, targeting Republicans like Al Cutrona of Boardman to pressure his vote.

That's a very different 'agenda' than the [hundreds of Ohioans](#) from every corner of our state, and spanning all walks of life, who raised their voices to say 'no'. These hard working Ohioans sacrificed wages and time with their families because any infringement on direct democracy raises serious questions. How did our gerrymandered, supermajority legislature respond? By cutting off debate, [denying their access to The People's House](#), and forcing a swift vote.

I absolutely agree. The Ohio Constitution is not a toy. I am a toy expert. I have four kids. Trust me, Ohioans aren't playing around with our constitution. Citizen-led ballot measures aren't overused. We've only had 16 since 1998. It's hard to get on the ballot in Ohio and win 50%.

Let's be clear, it's not special interests these power hungry politicians are afraid of. They're afraid of a grassroots, moderately sensible Ohio who will stop them from rigging the rules in their favor. HJR 1 and SJR 2 is the political agenda, propped up by outside special interests, who aren't concerned with the people of the Valley. Ohioans can, and should, be trusted with their Constitution using the rules that exist today.

*May 8, 2023, [The Vindicator Guest Column](#) by Representative Lauren McNally*

