



**Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose
HB 2106 Testimony
Kansas House Committee on Elections
February 4, 2025**

Chair Proctor, Vice Chair Waggoner, Ranking Member Haskins, and members of the Kansas House Committee on Elections, thank you for the opportunity to share our experience successfully fighting back against attempts by foreign nationals to rewrite Ohio's constitution.

As elected officials, we swear an oath to uphold our governing documents. Any amendment to those documents should be carefully debated and decided upon by American citizens only. However, a loophole in Ohio law was weaponized by political activists who managed to indirectly funnel hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign national money to ballot issue campaigns seeking to enshrine radical ideology into our state constitution.

Much of this activity can be traced to a single foreign national contributor. Billionaire activist Hansjörg Wyss has donated hundreds of millions of dollars to a network of dark money groups, which in turn funneled millions of dollars into Ohio ballot campaigns over the last two years. Although this billionaire is prohibited from donating directly to candidates or political committees, the Associated Press reports that "his influence is still broadly felt through millions of dollars routed through a network of nonprofit groups that ... don't have to disclose the source of their funding — or many details about how they spend it."¹ The New York Post adds that Wyss has become widely known for funding a "dark money revolving door" that has "effectively bypassed campaign finance restrictions barring non-citizens from meddling in American elections."² He has been described as a "progressive benefactor who makes U.S. barriers to foreign cash look like Swiss cheese."³

Wyss's influence in Ohio goes beyond financing ballot interests. The New York Times reports that he created his political foundation "partly to shape media coverage to help

¹ "Group steers Swiss billionaire's money to liberal causes," Associated Press, April 4, 2023

² <https://nypost.com/2022/05/26/inside-swiss-billionaire-hansjorg-wyss-dark-money-dem-donations/>

³ RealClear Investigations, 08/22/2023

Democratic causes.”⁴ Through its partisan dark money allies, Wyss has helped to build a network of pseudo-news publications under the umbrella of a left-leaning non-profit entity known as States Newsroom.

The scheme involves the creation of fake news outlets, such as one here in Ohio called the Ohio Capital Journal. These publications obtain press credentials allowing them to gain full access to the halls of our state government and further legitimizing their biased content but make no mistake. They are, in fact, weaponized political propaganda platforms operated by partisan activists. These operatives generate extremely biased content, most of it targeting Republicans, and provide it, often free of charge, to longstanding traditional newsrooms across Ohio. Many of them are eager to take it no questions asked, as they struggle to overcome limited budgets and shrinking staffs.

I raise the issue to demonstrate the extent of one foreign national’s financial reach in Ohio and the network of dark money influence he has constructed. Politico describes Mr. Wyss’s fund as one of the “biggest hubs of ‘dark money’” in politics and “a massive force” that has “spent widely on a range of liberal causes,” including swing-state TV ads and left-leaning ballot measures.⁵

The scope and sophistication of this scheme led me to work with our General Assembly on new legislation that would close the foreign influence loophole. Demonstrating the significance of the threat, our legislation became House Bill 1 in a special legislative session last summer. It is hardly coincidental that on the same day the Ohio governor called lawmakers back for a special session to deal with this threat, a foreign-influenced dark money group transferred nearly \$7 million to the committee advancing a redistricting amendment to our state constitution. This hurried transfer of funds appears to be an intentional effort to flout the new law.

After the legislature enacted House Bill 1 and the governor signed it into law, the beneficiaries of this foreign influence immediately sued to stop me from enforcing it. I successfully fought back – advancing the commonsense notion that American elections are for ONLY for American citizens.

Enacting our legislation in Ohio was a great first step, but enforcing these provisions can prove to be difficult. Billionaire foreign nationals and their political allies do their best to flaunt our laws and launder these dollars through various accounts, attempting to mask

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/13/business/media/wyss-tribune-company-buyer.html>

⁵ <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/18/liberal-billionaire-nonprofit-dark-money-00018513>

their foreign sources. If Kansas aims to protect its constitution from non-citizen activists, you must be prepared to vigorously investigate their schemes. Ohio empowered its state attorney general, with the assistance of the secretary of state, to investigate and prosecute these activities. Dark money is often dark for a reason, and America's campaign finance system can be exploited by complex transactions often designed to cover a nefarious trail. One might call it Swiss cheese, and I applaud the interest of our friends in Kansas to close these foreign influence loopholes. I stand ready to assist in any way you need.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I am happy to answer any questions.

Yours in service,



Frank LaRose

Ohio Secretary of State