

Build Citizen Power

Reading edition · September 5, 2026

Change the rules. Establish public duties. Organize to make them hold.

This edition includes the complete reading text and source notes. For the linked action tools, [download the HTML kit](#) and open index.html. Web source links in this PDF are clickable.

Public purpose needs a means of enforcement

The previous essay asks why property claims so often reach an enforceable remedy while basic needs remain requests. This guide moves from that diagnosis to three kinds of work: change the rules of public power, enact duties that people can claim, and organize the citizens who will demand and defend those changes.

These are connected proposals. Existing powers, new statutes, constitutional amendments and collective action have different decision-makers and limits. A strong demand names the change and the route that can deliver it.

1. Change the rules that allocate power

Change campaign-finance doctrine

Who can change it: Congress and states through Article V; the Supreme Court through a case that reaches it.

What the proposal must resolve: An ordinary statute cannot simply override a constitutional holding. Buckley distinguishes contributions from expenditures; Citizens United concerns independent spending, not every corporate right.

First citizen step: Ask a representative to identify the exact amendment or bill supported, the authority it changes, and the recorded vote sought.

A5: constituent voice

Change Supreme Court structure

Who can change it: Congress can legislate the Court's size. Term-limit proposals confront Article III's good-behavior tenure.

What the proposal must resolve: Adding seats does not end lifetime appointments or guarantee impartiality. Statutory term-limit designs remain constitutionally contested; an amendment offers a different route.

First citizen step: Request a written position on a specific design, including appointment timing, transition and constitutional basis.

Reverse It

Examine jurisdiction reform

Who can change it: Congress regulates federal jurisdiction within constitutional boundaries.

What the proposal must resolve: Article III's Exceptions Clause is not a guarantee that favored laws become immune from judicial review. Identify the court, claim, remedy and constitutional limit.

First citizen step: Ask for the proposed text and a public explanation of its limits before endorsing it.

Authority Explorer

Fund constituent participation

Who can change it: Federal, state or local lawmakers can design public election-financing programs within applicable law.

What the proposal must resolve: Seattle's vouchers operate through participating candidates. Public financing does not by itself remove independent spending or compel attention to any group. A match rate is a design choice, not a national rule.

First citizen step: Compare eligibility, participation, donor concentration, public cost and enforcement in one proposed program.

A5: constituent voice

Change representation rules

Who can change it: Congress and state lawmakers control different parts of election design.

What the proposal must resolve: Ranked-choice voting for one seat is not proportional representation. Multi-member U.S. House districts require changing the federal single-member district rule. No design guarantees a particular party's success.

First citizen step: Name the office, district model, ballot method and law that must change; ask for a public position on that design.

Election accountability

Rebuild congressional expertise

Who can change it: Congress sets its support-agency mandates, staffing and appropriations.

What the proposal must resolve: More independent analytical capacity can reduce dependence on outside material; it does not prove lobbyists cease influencing bills.

First citizen step: Request a funded staffing or research-capacity proposal and a way to disclose the evidence used in legislation.

Congressional oversight

2. Make public duties enforceable

Separate healthcare security from a job

Who can change it: Congress can enact and fund a broader public coverage system.

What the proposal must resolve: Single-payer and other public systems are distinct designs. Specify eligibility, benefits, payment, funding and transition; a proposal is not an existing universal entitlement.

First citizen step: Ask which bill or design the representative supports and what committee action they will pursue.

A5 and R8 healthcare

Strengthen labor rights and establish a job floor

Who can change it: Congress can change labor statutes and create a funded employment program.

What the proposal must resolve: The PRO Act, sectoral bargaining and a job guarantee are separate proposals. Do not represent one bill as automatically establishing all three. Coverage, enforcement, appropriations and administration matter.

First citizen step: Choose one enforceable protection or program, then ask for the responsible actor, budget, timetable and remedy for denial.

Rights Eight

Make shelter a public commitment

Who can change it: Federal, state and local governments have different funding, housing, land-use and tenancy powers.

What the proposal must resolve: Social housing, rent regulation and investor tax measures require distinct legal designs. A policy title does not establish authority or demonstrate its effects on supply and access.

First citizen step: Choose a specific program and ask who receives housing, at what cost, by when, and with what enforceable protection.

Rights Eight

Give the public a return for public risk

Who can change it: Congress and authorized agencies can design conditions within the governing rescue, subsidy or financing law.

What the proposal must resolve: Public equity, voting rights, pay limits and buyback restrictions are proposed conditions. Not every backstop permits equity ownership or the same terms.

First citizen step: Request the agreement, risk estimate, public-return terms, performance conditions and remedy for noncompliance.

Public money

3. Build organized citizen power

Build labor bargaining power

Who can change it: Workers and their organizations act through organizing, bargaining and applicable labor channels.

What the proposal must resolve: Strike protection depends on workers, purpose, timing and conduct. The historical role of collective action is not a promise that every tactic is protected or succeeds.

First citizen step: Work with an accountable labor organization to identify a demand, member decision process and legally assessed action.

Seven levers and ordinary routes

Organize tenants and debtors

Who can change it: Members can build associations, negotiate, document patterns and seek legal or legislative remedies.

What the proposal must resolve: Private claims are legally enforceable; compliance is not purely voluntary. Rent withholding or nonpayment may expose participants to eviction, collection or other consequences. Local protections differ.

First citizen step: Build a shared evidence record and obtain qualified local advice before recommending withholding payments.

Records and referrals

Build independent member-led coalitions

Who can change it: Citizens can organize around shared demands and hold candidates to recorded commitments.

What the proposal must resolve: Member dues and transparent governance are design commitments. Candidate activity and spending remain subject to election law; a contribution alone does not prove corruption.

First citizen step: Agree on one demand, a decision rule, a funding disclosure and a follow-up date. Record what the candidate promises and does.

Action workbench

Keep the argument accurate

Campaign spending: [Buckley](#) and [Citizens United](#) make different distinctions. “Money is speech” is a slogan, not a complete statement of either decision. A proposed amendment needs operative language, not just a declaration.

Court design: the [Supreme Court’s institutional history](#) distinguishes statutory size from good-behavior tenure. [CRS’s analysis of congressional control](#) addresses disputed limits; jurisdiction restriction is not a reliable shortcut around constitutional rights.

Election design: [Seattle’s official voucher program](#) is a bounded example. [2 U.S.C. §2c](#) requires single-member House districts. Financing, district design and vote-counting methods are separate controls.

Labor legislation: use the [specific PRO Act text](#) to evaluate the proposal. Do not attach a general sectoral-bargaining system or a federal job guarantee to it without separate legislative text.

Historical sequence: the Wagner Act was signed [July 5, 1935](#); Social Security was signed [August 14, 1935](#). The Flint sit-down strike ran [December 30, 1936–February 11, 1937](#). It cannot be the cause of those earlier enactments. Organized pressure’s broader historical role requires more than this chronology.

The supplied text’s claims about one primary cause, the Gilens–Page mechanism, an entire judicial era and guaranteed political effects remain arguments requiring fuller evidence. This guide retains the proposed changes without treating those broad claims as established findings.

Choose one change and build the record

Name the public duty you want made enforceable.

Identify who can change the rule and the instrument they must use.

Bring affected people together around a specific request.

Ask for a recorded commitment, a next decision and a date.

Track the response and the effect on people’s lives.

Start an action record · Return to The Law’s Ideological Shield · Test whether the benefit arrived

Supplied source text

Read the original wording, including claims qualified above

Altering a system where the legal apparatus and Congress systematically prioritize capital over the citizen requires interventions at three distinct levels: constitutional/structural, statutory/legislative, and countervailing public power.

Historically in the United States, significant shifts toward the citizen—such as the Progressive Era reforms or the New Deal—did not happen by asking power nicely; they occurred when organized public pressure forced the state to change the rules of enforcement.

The primary barrier to citizen-first policy is court-made doctrine that equates wealth with speech and treats property as an absolute command. Altering this foundation requires:

- Overturning Corporate Speech Precedents: A constitutional amendment (or Supreme Court reversal) targeting *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976) and *Citizens United v. FEC* (2010). Establishing that money is property, not speech, and that corporations are legal fictions without human constitutional rights, would restore the power of Congress and states to set strict campaign spending limits.
 - Depoliticizing the Judiciary: Reforming the Supreme Court through term limits (e.g., staggered 18-year terms) or expanding court size to end lifetime appointments that insulate jurists from popular democratic accountability.
 - Jurisdiction Stripping: Congress possesses the constitutional power under Article III to limit the appellate jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, preventing conservative or pro-corporate courts from striking down social safety net and labor laws.
- To break the Gilens-Page dynamic—where politicians serve donors because their political survival depends on them—the rules of elections must be rewired:
- Public Financing of Elections ("Democracy Vouchers"): Replacing private donor funding with systems like Seattle's Democracy Voucher program or public matching funds (e.g., a 6-to-1 match for small donations under \$100). This forces candidates to spend time courting thousands of working-class constituents rather than dialing billionaires in private call suites.
 - Ending Partisan Gerrymandering & Passing Proportional Representation: Moving away from winner-take-all, single-member districts toward ranked-choice voting (RCV) and multi-member districts. This breaks the two-party duopoly, allows labor-focused third parties to win legislative seats, and prevents gerrymandered safe seats where incumbents only fear corporate-backed primary challengers.
 - Rebuilding Congressional Analytical Capacity: Restoring congressional staff budgets, raising pay for civil service researchers, and re-establishing bodies like the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA). If Congress has its own in-house expertise, it stops relying on corporate trade lobbies to ghostwrite its bills.

Because the courts currently refuse to read positive economic rights into the Preamble or Due Process clauses, Congress must build those rights explicitly through federal statute:

- Severing Healthcare from Employment: Enacting universal healthcare (such as single-payer Medicare for All or a comprehensive public system). When healthcare is a guaranteed public right, employers lose their primary lever of coercion over workers.
- A Federal Job Guarantee & Strengthened Labor Law: Passing the PRO Act to eliminate "right-to-work" state laws, penalize union-busting, and legalize sectoral bargaining (negotiating across entire industries rather than shop-by-shop). A public works job guarantee would establish an effective wage and benefit floor that the private market would be forced to compete with.
- De-commodifying Shelter: Treating housing as social infrastructure rather than a speculative asset. This involves federal investments in mixed-income social housing, national rent stabilization standards, and tax penalties on private equity firms buying up single-family housing stock.
- Ending Downside Protection for Capital (No Bailouts Without Public Ownership): Conditioning any federal rescue, backstop, or subsidy on the state taking equity/voting shares, imposing strict caps on executive compensation, and barring stock buybacks. If the public absorbs the risk, the public must own the upside.

Constitutional and statutory changes only happen after organized social forces make the status quo ungovernable:

- Revitalizing Labor Unions & Strategic Strikes: Capital listens to labor only when labor withholds its participation. The strikes of the 1930s (sit-down strikes) forced corporate America and FDR to accept the National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act) and Social Security.
- Tenant & Debtor Unions: Collective bargaining power outside the workplace. Tenant unions organizing rent strikes and debtor networks coordinating debt resistance demonstrate that capital's paper claims (mortgages, medical debt, student debt) depend entirely on voluntary compliance.
- Independent Coalition Politics: Building grassroots political organizations accountable to their members—funded exclusively by small dues rather than corporate PACs—capable of running candidates and organizing primary challenges against legislators who sell out to capital.

This is not theoretical. Between 1890 and 1937, the United States was in the grip of the *Lochner* Era—a period where the Supreme Court struck down child labor bans, maximum working hours, and minimum wages under the banner of "liberty of contract."

It was dismantled not by legal arguments alone, but because a sustained combination of labor uprisings, mass public mobilization, and political pressure during the Great Depression forced the political system to yield. Transforming the system today requires that same pressure: stripping capital of its exclusive hold on law and rebuilding public institutions around the

enforceable well-being of the people.

The source is retained for comparison. The route guide above is an edited citizen-facing version, not a silent replacement of the supplied text.

Publication record

Directed by Thom Barrett. Original supplied wording is retained where labeled. New reading notes, source checks and reform guidance were prepared with OpenAI Codex assistance and await final author review. This is a review edition; source limits remain stated in the text.