

Corporations have free speech rights? Lawsuit over industry opposition to Washington GMO labeling bill raises pressing questions

A Washington Supreme Court hearing [October 22] on a record \$18 million fine against the food industry touched on boycotts, death threats and whether companies have the same free-speech protection as civil rights workers.

The Grocery Manufacturers Association, a trade group, faces the penalty for failing to timely report the names of the companies that contributed \$11 million in 2013 to defeat a GMO-labeling initiative.

An appeals court upheld the conviction, but found the violations were not intentional and slashed the penalty to \$6 million — still by far the largest fine ever in the U.S. for a campaign violation.

GMA is appealing the conviction, and the state Attorney General's Office is seeking to restore the \$18 million fine.

At the heart of GMA's case is whether companies and executives faced retaliation by engaging in political speech. After a bruising initiative battle in California in 2012, GMA set up a separate account to take in money from members. GMA then contributed \$11 million under its name to the "no" campaign.

Under pressure from the state, GMA named the companies shortly before the election.

Read full, original article: [Washington high court probes food industry's speech rights](#)