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People's Legislature rallies for Capitol reform

More than 400 members of the People's Legislature rallied against political corruption on the steps of the State Capitol on October 27. Participants brandished brooms to drive home the point that the Capitol needs to be swept clean. They then showered the governor's office and the offices of their state legislators with fliers calling for a special session on reform.

Rally-goers called for lawmakers to focus the special session on four reform measures, including: **Assembly Bill 626**, a bipartisan campaign finance reform bill modeled after the successful systems in Arizona and Maine;



Hundreds of brooms drove home the rally's message

Senate Bill 1, an ethics reform proposal that replaces the state Elections Board and Ethics Board with a beefed-up and politically independent Government Accountability Board; and **Assembly Joint Resolutions 22 and 41**, which would create competitive elections through reform of legislative redistricting.

Message Getting Through

Less than a week after the rally, the state Senate approved Senate Bill 1 on a bipartisan 28-5 vote. Governor Jim Doyle signaled his support for SB 1 and top Assembly leaders said they thought the bill could pass the lower house as well.

A recent St. Norbert College Survey Center poll showed that political corruption is now one of the most common answers people give when asked to identify the most important problem facing Wisconsin. Corruption at the Capitol was cited as often as gas prices, and corruption ranked ahead of health care, crime, poverty and the environment as the top concern of state residents, according to the survey.



WDC director Mike McCabe charges up the crowd

Marking 10 years of hell-raising

About 200 Democracy Campaign members celebrated WDC's 10th anniversary on November 21 at Madison's Edgewater Hotel. The highlight of the evening was the presentation of the "Mr. Smith Award" to U.S. Senator Russ Feingold.

The Mr. Smith Award – or "Smitty" for short – is named for the classic Jimmy Stewart movie *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Senator Feingold was honored for his years of work for ethics in government and campaign finance reform, including the enactment of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2001, commonly known as the McCain-Feingold bill.

"Senator Feingold stands alone among elected officials in Wisconsin when it comes to delivering campaign finance and ethics reforms," WDC director Mike McCabe said. "A lot of politicians say they are for these reforms, but Russ Feingold has actually gotten some enacted."

McCabe highlighted some of WDC's accomplishments over the past 10 years and singer-satirist and Wisconsin Public Television regular Peter Leidy provided musical entertainment. In one of his songs, Leidy offered himself up as Senator Feingold's running mate in a presidential bid.



WDC-led coalition challenges Milwaukee TV stations' licenses

A coalition of groups and Milwaukee-area residents calling itself the **Milwaukee Public Interest Media Coalition** filed a petition November 1 with the Federal Communications Commission challenging the renewal of all commercial television licenses in the Milwaukee market because of a marketwide failure of local stations to serve the public interest by meaningfully covering 2004 state and local election campaigns.

Accompanying the petition is a study by the national Center for Media and Public Affairs showing that election coverage accounted for only 5% of the total air time devoted to news by the five highest-rated Milwaukee TV stations in the four weeks prior to the 2004 general election. Nearly three-quarters of that meager amount of election coverage was devoted to the presidential race. Less than 2 percent of total election coverage by Milwaukee stations focused on state-level elections and local races.

What little election coverage Milwaukee stations offered focused very little on election issues. Less than a quarter of campaign-related stories focused primarily on issues, while nearly half dwelled on campaign strategy or "horse race" coverage, according to CMPA's analysis.

The CMPA study also showed that only 13% of election-related news stories featured candidates speaking on their own behalf, and the average candidate soundbite was 10.7 seconds long.

The Milwaukee Public Interest Media Coalition is made up of nine organizations and a number of individual Milwaukee-area residents. Groups in the coalition include the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, League of Women Voters of Wisconsin, Common Cause in Wisconsin, Wisconsin State AFL-CIO, Milwaukee County Labor Council (AFL-CIO), Wisconsin Citizen Action, the Coordinating Committee Against Hate Speech, Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin and Peace Action Wisconsin. Milwaukee-area residents who signed onto the petition include Milwaukee school board member and 2004 state Senate candidate Jennifer Morales, former Milwaukee city council member Don Richards, 2004 state Assembly candidate Dennis Uhlig, Jerry Fredrickson and journalist Geoff Davidian.



Mike McCabe presents Senator Russ Feingold the Mr. Smith Award

Colorado dumps Accenture; voter-list project here in turmoil

Colorado earlier this month became the second state this year to pull the plug on a statewide voter-list project with the global outsourcing firm Accenture. Kansas terminated its agreement with Accenture in March.

Accenture remains under contract in Wisconsin to deliver a computerized voter registration system. The state Elections Board and Accenture acknowledged in September that the state will not meet the January 1, 2006 federal deadline for completion of the voter list project. At the time of that announcement, state and company officials were targeting the spring 2006 elections for an initial rollout of the new system.

Now Elections Board director Kevin Kennedy says persistent glitches in the system will prevent implementation in April and a statewide rollout is not realistic until at least September 2006.

Accenture has yet to deliver a working computerized voter registration system in any state. Pennsylvania entered into its agreement with Accenture in July 2002 and still does not have an operational statewide system more than three years later. Wisconsin and Wyoming are the other two states still under contract with Accenture. Wisconsin entered into its agreement with the company in November 2004.

Democracy Campaign director Mike McCabe and seven others filed a lawsuit last December seeking cancellation of the contract on the grounds that the Elections Board never voted to approve the deal before Kennedy signed it. A circuit court judge ruled in June that Kennedy did not have the authority to unilaterally enter into the agreement with Accenture, but nevertheless upheld the contract on the grounds that the board retroactively ratified the contract – more than a month after the lawsuit challenging the deal was filed.

The Democracy Campaign now is calling on the Elections Board to declare a “material breach” of the contract to put pressure on Accenture to meet its contractual obligations. Declaring a breach would give the company 60 days to complete work on the project. If it failed to do so, the state would then have the option to cancel the contract without financial penalty.

Illinois wheeler-dealers stake claim in Wisconsin governor race

A Wisconsin Democracy Campaign review of Illinois contributors to the major-party candidates for governor in Wisconsin showed nearly \$23,000 in donations from 10 individuals who have been convicted or indicted on corruption charges, or who are connected to state and federal criminal investigations.

Chicago attorney Stuart Levine, who was charged with 41 crimes in connection with a kickback scheme, has donated large sums to Republican candidates Mark Green and Scott Walker. Green also accepted campaign money from Nicholas Hurtgen, a former senior manager of a Chicago bond house and onetime aide to former Governor Tommy Thompson, who faces a seven-count federal indictment for conspiring with Levine.

Green’s campaign also got help from Chicago attorney Joseph Cari, who pleaded guilty in September to attempted extortion in a kickback scheme with Levine in 2004, as well as Michael Ficaro, an attorney from Cari’s law firm who has been publicly accused of having ties to organized crime.

Among Walker’s other Illinois donors is John Glennon, who was charged in the Levine-Hurtgen embezzlement and fraud scheme, and Patrick Ryan, whose company agreed to repay customers \$190 million to settle a federal complaint that accused Ryan and the company of cheating customers by steering them to certain insurers in return for kickbacks.

On Democratic Governor Jim Doyle’s Illinois donor list is Dean Buntrock, whose company was the target of a Securities and Exchange Commission complaint in August alleging “massive financial fraud” that triggered a settlement requiring Buntrock to pay \$19.45 million in penalties and other payments.

Put WDC on your holiday gift list

See how you can help us keep shining light in dark places at the Capitol in the special insert in this Big Money Bulletin.

Poll shows depth of public disgust

Results of a public opinion survey released in late October show that only 6% of Wisconsin residents believe elected officials are representing them. Almost half think elected officials are just advancing their own political careers, while over 40% say public officials are doing the bidding of special interests.

The citizen survey was conducted by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, a self-described “free market think tank” based in the upscale Milwaukee suburb of Thiensville and funded by the right-wing Bradley Foundation.

WPRI said the “most stunning number” was that no African Americans interviewed believe their elected officials put constituents’ interests first.

The poll shows that state residents also believe their

elected representatives have lowered their ethical standards and that ethics in government is getting worse.

WPRI’s report says the “widespread feeling that the institutions in Madison were deteriorating ethically produced the highest negative numbers we have seen in our polling going back to 1991.”

The report goes on to say there are “no demographic groups in Wisconsin who believe the ethics in Madison have improved over the last decade. Wisconsin residents seem to have much less confidence in their elected officials and are questioning the ethics of their government institutions. These downward trends are not good for Wisconsin government. Unfortunately, Wisconsin citizens are clearly saying that they think lobbyists have much more influence than they do, and that is negatively affecting the ethics in state government.”



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