



Justice Stevens's Wisdom Lives On

The death of former Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens on July 16 was a blow to all those who valued his clarion voice in defense of democratic principles. But his prescient dissent in the *Citizens United* case in 2010 lives on. Here are a few excerpts:

“Corporations have no consciences, no beliefs, no feelings, no thoughts, no desires. Corporations help structure and facilitate the activities of human beings, to be sure, and their “personhood” often serves as a useful legal fiction. But they are not themselves members of “We the People” by whom and for whom our Constitution was established.”

“In a functioning democracy the public must have faith that its representatives owe their positions to the people, not to the corporations with the deepest pockets.”

“Starting today, corporations with large war chests to deploy on electioneering may find democratically elected bodies becoming much more attuned to their interests.”

Late Summer Drought

Late summer is hard on us here at the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, as many of our supporters are on vacation and our cash-flow dries up.

That’s why we’re hoping that you’ll send us a tax-deductible donation in the envelope that’s enclosed.



Let it rain!

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Aug/Sept 2019

Edition No. 116

www.wisdc.org



Taxes and Democracy

Dear Friend,

I was invited to give a little talk at the State Capitol on July 24 at a “Tax the Rich” rally.

It seemed outside our usual purview, so I demurred, but when I was asked again, I accepted, because I increasingly recognize the threat to our democracy that we face because of the lopsided distribution of wealth and income in this country.

First of all, it makes a mockery of our belief in equality of opportunity.

The offspring of the Walton Family that owns Wal-Mart, or Warren Buffett’s kids, or Jeff Bezos’s kids, or Bill Gates’s kids, or any of the children of the 1 percent don’t begin life at the same starting line as most people’s kids do. That’s so obvious on its face that I have to wonder why we even talk about equality of opportunity any more.

And secondly, the super-rich and the corporations they own are devouring our democracy. Through their donations, through their dark money, through their lobbying, they have much more power than the rest of us in deciding who gets elected, and what laws are passed, and what policies are pursued.

That’s not how democracy is supposed to work. In a democracy, we’re all supposed to have an equal say. And we just don’t. That’s patently obvious, too.

As Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis warned us eight decades ago, “We must make our choice. We may have democracy. Or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few. But we can’t have both.”

So let’s make the right choice. Let’s choose democracy!

Matt



Banning Gerrymandering Gains GOP Backers

This session, Sen. Dave Hansen (D-Green Bay) and Rep. Robyn Vining (D-Wauwatosa) have introduced two bills, **SB288** and **AB303**, to give us a fair, independent, nonpartisan way to do redistricting.

Their bills are co-sponsored by four Republicans this time, which is three more than last time. The Republicans co-sponsors are: Rep. Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay), Rep. Todd Novak (R-Dodgeville), Rep. Loren Oldenburg, (R-Viroqua), and Rep. Travis Tranel (R-Cuba City).

Rep. Novak, who has co-sponsored bills for nonpartisan redistricting in previous sessions, sent out a notice to all his constituents, stressing how “paramount” it is to have nonpartisan redistricting to ensure “fair and balanced elections.” Wrote Novak: “I proudly support this bill and the creation of a nonpartisan redistricting process...I will continue to fight for nonpartisan redistricting and will make sure that every voice of my constituents is heard.”

Please contact your legislators and urge them to support **SB288** and **AB303**. And please contact the heads of the relevant committees and demand that they hold a hearing on these bills.

The chair of the Senate Committee on Government Operations, Technology and Consumer Protection is Senator Duey Stroebel. His phone number is **(608) 266-7513**.

The chair of the Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections is Representative Ron Tusler. His phone number is **(608) 266-5831**.

How to Contact Your Legislators

It's easy. Just call the **legislative hotline**.

If you're in Madison the number is **266-9960**.

Otherwise call toll-free at **1-800-362-9472**.

Ask to be connected to your legislator's office. And if you don't know who represents you, don't be embarrassed.

Just ask the hotline and they'll tell you.

Or you can email legislators—include your name and city of residence.

Rep.[last name]@legis.wi.gov

(exceptions: rep.otjtj@, rep.rob.brooks@)

Sen.[last name]@legis.wi.gov

“Unlock the Vote”

Three Democratic legislators introduced two crucial bills in July to rectify problems with our voting system related to incarceration.

The first bill, “Unlock the Vote,” would grant formerly incarcerated people the right to vote as soon as they are free. Currently, they are not allowed to vote unless they are “off paper”— which means, they've completed their supervision, parole, or probation. At the moment, there are about 66,000 formerly incarcerated individuals in Wisconsin who can't vote because they are still “on paper.” (Legislative Reference Bureau bill draft 1522.)

“Denying them the right to vote upon release is an injustice that must stop,” said Sen. Lena Taylor at a press conference in the State Capitol.

It's wrong, added Rep. Jodi Emerson, that there are “66,000 people who have no voice” in Wisconsin.

The second bill, “Prison Gerrymandering Elimination Act,” is also important. “Prison gerrymandering” is when inmates are counted, for purposes of the Census, as living in the community where the jail or prison is located – and not as a member of the community where they're from. So, for instance, if you live in Milwaukee but are incarcerated in Waupun, you're counted as living in Waupun, and as a result, Waupun's population goes up, and the representation and resources that flow to Waupun go up, and those for Milwaukee go down. That's how it works currently in Wisconsin. This bill would change that and count inmates as being from their actual home communities and not from the prison location. (Legislative Reference Bureau bill draft 3567.)

“Prison gerrymandering distorts democracy by artificially inflating the areas that have prisons,” said Representative David Crowley at the press conference.

The Democracy Campaign strongly supports these bills.

We urge you to contact your legislators to co-sponsor and champion **LRB-1522** and **LRB-3567**.

Special Interest Follies

GOP Accepts Bulk of Corporate Contributions in First Half of 2019

Corporate contributions to the state GOP and two Republican legislative campaign committees were nearly five times higher than the corporate contributions to their Democratic counterparts during the first six months of 2019.

The state Republican Party, Republican Assembly Campaign Committee, and Committee to Elect a Republican Senate accepted \$321,910 in corporate contributions between January and June. During the same time, the state Democratic Party and the Democratic legislative campaign committees accepted \$64,875 in corporate contributions.

The top five corporate were:

Charter Communications, a total of \$32,000, including \$12,000 each to the Republican legislative campaign committees and \$4,000 each to the Democratic legislative campaign committees;

Wisconsin Beer Distributors Association, \$32,000, including \$12,000 each to the Republican legislative campaign committees and \$4,000 each to the Democratic legislative campaign committees;

Alliance of Health Insurers, \$26,500, including \$12,000 each to the Republican legislative campaign committees and \$2,500 to the state Republican Party;

Wisconsin Insurance Alliance, \$21,000, including \$12,000 to the Republican Assembly Campaign Committee, \$5,000 to the Committee to Elect a Republican Senate, \$3,000 to the State Senate Democratic Committee, and \$1,000 to the Assembly Democratic Campaign Committee;

Anthem, a health insurance company, \$20,000, including \$10,000 each to the two GOP legislative campaign committees;

New state campaign finance laws approved in late 2015 by the GOP-controlled legislature and Republican Gov. Scott Walker allow corporate contributions of up to \$12,000 a year to each party and legislative campaign committee.

For more than 100 years prior to this, such corporate contributions were illegal.

Influence Peddlers

As we continue to go down the list of groups doing the most outside spending in Wisconsin's elections, we arrived at two Democratic-leaning groups.

July's Influence Peddler of the Month was Planned Parenthood Advocates of Wisconsin.

Since 2010, the group has sponsored more than \$2.7 million in electioneering activities in Wisconsin elections. Most recently, it spent \$704,000 on spring, fall, and special elections in 2018 and 2019, including:

\$220,230 to help elect Evers and his running mate Mandela Barnes.

\$182,147 to help elect Democratic Attorney General Josh Kaul.

\$123,695 to support Appeals Judge Lisa Neubauer, who lost to Appeals Judge Brian Hagedorn in the Wisconsin Supreme Court race.

August's Influence Peddler of the Month was the **Wisconsin Education Association Council**. Although hobbled by the GOP anti-union law known as Act 10, WEAC remains among the top special interest campaign contributors to Democrats in state elections.

In 2018, contributions from the union's main political action committee, WEAC PAC, topped all special interest PAC contributors at \$312,675. WEAC PAC contributions between January 2011 and December 2018 totaled just over \$736,000 – second only to the \$749,000 doled out by the Wisconsin Realtors Association's PAC. Top recipients of WEAC PAC contributions during this period were:

Democratic Gov. Tony Evers, \$86,000;

Democratic Attorney General Josh Kaul, \$44,000;

Former Democratic candidates for governor Mary Burke and Kathleen Falk, \$43,128 each;

Democratic Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes, \$29,000.

In addition to contributions from WEAC PAC, about 40 other national, regional, and local teacher's union PACs affiliated with WEAC doled out more than \$1.5 million in campaign contributions between January 2011 and December 2018. That included about \$380,000 in 2018.

Read more here:

wisdc.org/news/influence-peddler-of-the-month