

Big Money Bulletin

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Shame on the Wis. Supreme Court

Shame on the Wisconsin Supreme Court for striking another blow against open government in Wisconsin.

It voted 5-2 on June 21 to stop holding its administrative meetings in public, which it had been doing for more than two decades.

All five conservative justices voted to close the doors to the public. The two liberal justices, Shirley Abrahamson and Ann Walsh Bradley, voted in favor of keeping the doors open.

Just what were the conservative justices afraid of -- that the public might see how ludicrous their rationales are?

Their “feeble” rationales were on full display, for instance, when the Court met in April to discuss the petition from 54 retired Wisconsin judges urging the Court tighten its recusal rules. (“Feeble” was Justice Shirley Abrahamson’s legal term, not mine.)

The first rationale was that the petition impugned the character of every judge in the state by implying that they are corruptible – as if no judge in Wisconsin is ever influenced by the money that flows into his or her campaign account.

And the second rationale was an absurd twisting of the First Amendment. They said that by tightening the recusal rules, they would be interfering with people’s right to “participate in judicial elections.” By “participate,” they essentially meant the donors’ right to have a judge who is in their pocket hear their case.

If I made such appallingly bad arguments in public, I, too,



might want to pass a rule saying we should keep these things private.

But democracy demands openness.

And Wisconsin’s tradition demands it, too.

Math

Cleaning Things Up

Over the last couple of months, Sen. Chris Larson of Milwaukee has introduced several bills that would go a long way toward cleaning up the mess that the Republican majority made of our campaign finance law back in 2015.

It turned Wisconsin politics more and more into a playground for corporations, the dark money groups, and the very rich -- a playground that is essentially fenced off to the rest of us.

It did this by:

- doubling the amount of money that rich individuals could give to candidates

- putting no limit whatsoever on what rich individuals can give to political parties

- allowing corporations for the first time in more than 100 years to give directly to political parties

- legalizing coordination with so-called issue advocacy groups and defining coordination so narrowly that candidates can now coordinate, with a wink and nod, even with express advocacy groups.

Larson's bills would undo the damage on all these fronts.

In a related piece of legislation, Sen. Jon Erpenbach of Middleton has introduced a bill requiring dark money groups to disclose who funds them.

Please contact your legislators — urge them to co-sponsor Senate Bills 352 through 358 and disclosure bill draft LRB-1294/3, and to call for a public hearing.

Door County Harvest

When you think of Door County, the first things to come to mind might be summer vacations, fish boils, and cherry pie.

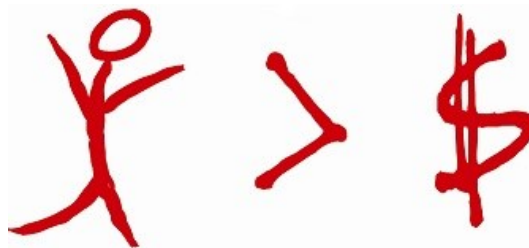
But you should add pro-democracy political activism to that list.

Just in the last five months, seven Door County communities have shown their support for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would get money out of politics and give citizens their voices back in our elections.

The city of Sturgeon Bay, the towns of Baileys Harbor, Egg Harbor, Forestville and Liberty Grove along with the villages of Egg Harbor and Ephraim, all have unanimously approved resolutions backing an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that proclaims that corporations are not persons and money is not speech.

They are part of a tremendous grassroots movement in Wisconsin where 112 communities have voted, by overwhelming margins and with broad bipartisan support, to curb the role of big and dark money in our politics.

If you'd like your community to join up, please contact George Penn of Wisconsin United to Amend (www.wiuta.org) at geo_penn@charter.net.



Note to Reader

If you'd like to get our weekly **e-mail alerts** about the latest news and taking action on money and politics in Wisconsin, please sign-up directly on our website (www.wisdc.org) or contact us at (608) 255-4260 or email speer@wisdc.org.

Special Interest Follies

Showing Walker Some Love

Ten Wisconsin donors contributed more than \$1 million to a group headed by Republican Gov. Scott Walker that raises unlimited amounts of cash from special interests to elect GOP candidates for governor nationwide.

The Wisconsin contributions were made to the Republican Governors Association, based in Washington, D.C., during the first six months of 2017.

The association has been among the top special interest electioneering groups in Wisconsin, doling out an estimated \$18.4 million to help Walker win his 2010 general, 2012 recall, and 2014 reelection. Walker was chosen last year as the group's 2017 chairman.

The Wisconsin contributors to the group and the amounts they gave in the first half of 2017 were:

- Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce, \$362,500
- Shannon 2006 Revocable Trust, of Milwaukee, \$250,000, controlled by Mike and Mary Sue Shannon.
- American Transmission Co., of Waukesha, \$150,000
- Forest County Potawatomi Community, of Crandon, \$150,000
- U.S. Venture, of Appleton, \$50,000
- Robert Hillis, of Milwaukee, president of Direct Supply, \$25,000
- Michael Best Strategies, of Madison, the lobbying and consulting arm of the Michael Best & Friedrich law firm, \$25,000
- Fabair LLC, of Milwaukee, a private plane service operated by Milwaukee businessman Jere Fabick, \$11,606
- MillerCoors, of Milwaukee, \$10,000
- Milwaukee Police Association, \$1,000

Gutting Regulation

The GOP-controlled legislature passed a bill that would make it much more difficult to protect the environment, consumer rights, and public health and safety.

It would prevent a state agency from creating any new rules and regulations that cost a business or industry more than \$10 million without legislative approval.

The bill is similar to a 2012 plan developed by a pro-business group called the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which was founded by Charles and David Koch.

The bill was backed by the Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC), the state's largest business group, and Americans for Prosperity, a rightwing electioneering group also founded by the Koch brothers.

WMC secretly raised and spent an estimated \$18.6 million between January 2010 and December 2016 on outside electioneering activities to support Republican and conservative legislative and statewide candidates.

Americans for Prosperity secretly raised and spent \$5.7 million during the same period and for similar purposes.

Influence Peddler of the Month

The **Wisconsin Hospital Association** has spent \$9.8 million since 2000 on state lobbying, campaign contributions, and outside election activities in Wisconsin.

Topping the list of contributions received through the hospital association's conduit and PAC between January 2000 and December 2016 were:

- Republican Gov. Scott Walker, \$241,396
- Former Democratic Gov. Jim Doyle, \$143,200
- Republican Assembly Campaign Committee, \$107,375
- Assembly Democratic Campaign Committee, \$100,720
- Committee to Elect a Republican Senate, \$92,630

Civic Activism

We need our democracy to work for so many reasons—to prevent war, to protect our environment, to get paid a living wage, to have decent health care that can't be taken away, to provide decent schools for our kids, and not least, so that we can make sure that persons with disabilities can lead a dignified life and live where they want to live, work where they can work, and participate as equal citizens.

At the fundamental level, being pro-democracy means being pro-human beings and pro-community. It means seeing every person as innately valuable, and it means defending the rights and worth of every person, and not seeing people as consumers, or mere factors of production, or mere users of social services.

Together, we must engage in civic activism for the common good. We are much stronger together than when we fight in an isolated way.

Together, and only together, are we going to succeed in bringing about a more humane and a more democratic state and country.

Excerpt from Matt Rothschild's speech on "Why the Disability Rights Movement and the Democracy Movement Need Each Other" at the Democracy and Citizen Engagement Conference, sponsored by the Developmental Disabilities Network, in Madison on June 20.



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