Come to a Big Talk on Democracy!

Dear Friend,

I’m happy to announce that we’ve got an amazing speaker for our annual celebration on May 3.

It’s Nancy MacLean, the author of the crucially important book, Democracy in Chains, which was a finalist for the National Book Award last year.

It reveals the relentless campaign, funded by the Koch Brothers and hatched by a political economist in Virginia, to eliminate unions, suppress voting, privatize everything from schools to Medicare and Social Security, stop action on climate change, and alter the U.S. Constitution to limit the power of the people.

MacLean’s talk on May 3 is entitled “The Origins of Today’s Radical Right and the Crisis of Democracy,” and she’ll be doing a book signing afterwards.

I’ll also be giving a little spiel on who really rules Wisconsin. Clue: It’s not Scott Walker; it’s his donors.

Like last year, the event will be held at the Lussier Family Heritage Center (map below), registration starting at 5:30 p.m.

RSVP to 608-255-4260 or speer@wisdc.org.

See you there!

Matt
Sweet Victory!

It’s not often that we’ve had occasion, over the last seven years, to celebrate a victory for democracy here in Wisconsin, but March 29 was one of those rare days.

On March 29, Gov. Scott Walker followed the law that he had been violating for months and called special elections for Assembly Seat 42 and Senate Seat 1.

On March 29, Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald threw in the towel on his crude bill to change the law on special elections so they wouldn’t have to hold them in these two districts.

We testified against that bill on March 28, saying, “There is no fig leaf in the Amazon jungle that’s big enough to cover up this transparent move to keep Wisconsin citizens in Assembly District 42 and Senate District 1 underrepresented.”

And three judges were more withering than we were when they ordered Walker to obey the law and call the elections.

As Appellate Judge Paul Reilly ruled: “Representative government and the election of our representatives are never ‘unnecessary,’ never a ‘waste of taxpayer resources.’ ”

Finally, Walker and Fitzgerald relented.

Finally, democracy in Wisconsin prevailed, for at least a day.

More Wins!

On April 3, nine communities voted on a referendum to proclaim that corporations aren’t persons and money isn’t speech:

- Green and St. Croix counties.
- La Crosse, Marshfield, Rice Lake, and Sun Prairie.
- The villages of McFarland and Wittenberg, and the town of Sand Creek in Dunn County.

It won in all nine communities, and by overwhelming margins!

This brings the total to 129 communities in Wisconsin that have now demanded that we amend the U.S. Constitution to give democracy a chance.

And for that, you can thank the great organizers and volunteers at Wisconsin United to Amend (wiuta.org).

Influence Peddler of the Month

March: Americans for Prosperity

The state arm of Americans for Prosperity is one of Wisconsin’s top outside electioneering spenders, doling out an estimated $5.7 million since January 2010 on Wisconsin legislative and statewide elections. Most of that money, an estimated $4.8 million, went to help Republican Gov. Scott Walker win his 2012 recall and 2014 reelection campaigns.

Americans for Prosperity was created by rightwing billionaire industrialists Charles and David Koch.

In addition to outside electioneering activities, Koch political action committees (PACs) and its corporation directly contributed $125,500 to Republican legislative and statewide candidates and fundraising committees in Wisconsin between January 2010 and December 2017.

April: Republican Governors Association

This Washington, D.C.-based group, whose mission is to elect Republican candidates for governor nationwide, is one of the top-spending outside electioneering groups in Wisconsin.


The group operates a state political action committee called Right Direction Wisconsin that makes independent expenditures. The organization has also engaged in secret issue ad spending.

The two biggest Wisconsin donors to the RGA since 2002 are:

- Mike and Mary Sue Shannon, of Brookfield, $3 million. Mike Shannon is a managing partner with KSL Capital Partners, a private equity firm that invests in travel and leisure businesses, and Mary Sue is a homemaker.
- The Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce, $1,980,525.
“Tort Deform”

The legislature passed and Walker signed a bill recently that curbs the rights of citizens to get justice in the courtroom.

Assembly Bill 773 reduces from six to three years the statutes of limitations for civil lawsuits involving liability, fraud, rights violations, and injury to character.

The deadline for suing over injuries caused by property improvements is cut from 10 years to six years.

The measure also lowers the interest rate insurers must pay on overdue insurance claims from the current 12 percent to 7.5 percent.

The bill was backed by a host of powerful special interests – including insurance, business, agriculture, construction, and hospitals – led by Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC), the state’s largest business group.

Less Local Control

The legislature also passed a bill that forbids local governments from setting higher minimum wages or labor standards for public contractors in their communities.

The measure, Assembly Bill 748, also prohibits local governments from using labor peace agreements where employers agree not to interfere with attempts by labor unions to organize workers.

And it forbids local governments from setting occupational licensing regulations that are tougher than state standards.

Support for the bill was led by Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC) and Americans for Prosperity.

Deep-Sixing a Marine Sanctuary

When Gov. Scott Walker rescinded his nomination for a federal designation of a marine sanctuary north of Milwaukee on March 6, he caught a lot of people by surprise.

Walker had made the nomination back in 2014 with the support of the municipalities in the area, including Manitowoc, Port Washington, Sheboygan, and Two Rivers. The designation was supposed to preserve the area for scuba divers and others interested in shipwrecks. And it was expected to boost tourism in the area.

So why did Walker, who brags about boosting tourism, all of a sudden change his mind on the Wisconsin-Lake Michigan National Marine Sanctuary?

Well, it turns out that some rightwing ideologues, along with Lake Michigan property owners, made a stink.

Jim Zeiler is president of a group called Citizens for Responsible Zoning and Landowner Rights, based in Hudson, clear across the state. Zeiler, who was named “Volunteer of the Year” in 2009 by Americans for Prosperity Wisconsin, claimed that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration was somehow going to take over Lake Michigan.

The Wisconsin Conservative Coalition, consisting of four tea party groups, also opposed the designation, as did some lakefront property owners.

After Walker announced his decision, he received praise from the Wisconsin Water Alliance, whose officers include the general counsel of MilkSource LLC, one of the biggest factory farms in Wisconsin, as well as the general counsel of Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce.
Demanding a Fair Census

The Wisconsin Democracy Campaign joined with the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and other groups in signing an April 10 letter to two Congressional committees, urging them to hold oversight hearings on the Trump Administration’s decision to include a citizenship question in the upcoming 2020 Census.

“The inclusion of the question will impact the Bureau’s ability to reach and count all communities equally well, especially in the current contemporary environment of fear,” the letter states. “The Constitution vests Congress with the responsibility for overseeing the enumeration and achieving that goal. While the census—as the basis for political apportionment and equal representation—has political consequences, the conduct of the census must be strictly nonpartisan and non-political.”

The Wisconsin Democracy Campaign is also working in coalition with statewide good government groups to put pressure on our elected officials in Washington to ensure that no one is undercounted, underrepresented, or intimidated by the Census.

The Trump administration added a new untested citizenship question to the 2020 Census. Congress has the power to fix this. #SaveTheCensus

Please Donate!

We need your support to keep campaigning for a fully functioning democracy, where everyone has an equal voice. As you’ll see, we’ve tucked in a card and a return envelope, so please send us a donation, which is tax-deductible when you itemize. The whole staff thanks you!