Getting the Word Out

Dear Friend,

Here’s an example of how we do what we do.

I start each workday by going to The Wheeler Report. It’s an excellent daily online listing of stories and press releases about politics in Wisconsin.

One day in early July, I saw a headline there from a story in U.S. News & World Report entitled “Investment Firm EnCap to Pay $500,000 to Settle Pay-To-Play Claims.”

I’d never heard of EnCap but I was intrigued by the “pay-to-play” charge, and wondered how it related to Wisconsin. So I clicked on the story. It said that an executive of EnCap, which invests state pension funds, had allegedly violated SEC guidelines by giving campaign contributions to officials in Indiana, Texas, and Wisconsin who have decision-making power over their states’ pension investments. But it didn’t mention who the Wisconsin official was. All it said was: “An EnCap associate contributed to the federal election campaign of an elected official in Wisconsin whose state office was involved in selecting advisers for a public pension fund, according to the SEC filing.”

Not to be deterred, we went to the SEC’s website and found the filing against EnCap, and sure enough, the Wisconsin elected official was none other than Scott Walker.

To find out who the donor to Walker was, we went to EnCap’s website and looked up each of the principals at opensecrets.org, the great website from the Center for Responsive Politics that tracks federal campaign contributions. Turns out that one of the founding partners of EnCap, Robert Zorich, had made a $2,700 donation to Walker’s 2016 presidential campaign, as had Zorich’s wife. (The Walker campaign eventually returned both donations.)

The SEC settlement order said that between February 2011 and April 2015, the State of Wisconsin Investment Board invested $212.5 million in six funds advised by EnCap. In addition, the company continued to provide advice to the board during the two years after Zorich’s contribution to Walker.

All this was news to Wisconsin, which we broke. We posted it on our website and social media, we contacted some news outlets about it, and it was picked up by Urban Milwaukee, the Wisconsin Gazette, and the Wisconsin State Journal.

That’s how we get the word out.
1. Are you for banning gerrymandering in Wisconsin? In other words, do you back the Iowa model of independent, nonpartisan, and transparent map drawing by career civil servants – not the party in power?

2. Are you in favor of rewriting our campaign finance law to ban corporations, unions, and other groups from giving directly to political parties and legislative campaign committees?

3. Are you in favor of requiring those bogus “issue-advocacy” groups to disclose who is giving them money so that we can find out who is paying for all the mud they’re throwing at our screens in an election season?

4. Are you in favor of banning coordination between candidates and these bogus “issue-advocacy” groups?

5. Are you in favor of imposing a low ceiling on how much an individual can give to political parties? Right now in Wisconsin, the sky is the limit.

6. Are you in favor of imposing a low ceiling on how much an individual can give to a particular candidate? Right now, if you’re super rich, you may give $20,000 to each candidate for every statewide office: governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, secretary of state, state school superintendent, state treasurer, and state supreme court justice.

7. Are you in favor of requiring donors to candidates to disclose the names of their employers, as campaigns were required to report for decades prior to the 2015 campaign finance law overhaul?

8. Are you in favor of public financing of elections?

9. Are you in favor of tight recusal rules for judges and justices when one of the parties to a case also happens to be, or represents, one of their big donors?

10. Are you in favor of amending the U.S. Constitution to proclaim, once and for all, that corporations aren’t persons and money isn’t speech?

**Influence Peddler of the Month**

In July, we gave our highly coveted monthly “Influence Peddler” award to the [National Democratic Redistricting Committee](https://www.nationaldemocrats.com), which was founded by former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, who is considering a run for the presidency.

In its first six months of outside spending on Wisconsin legislative and statewide elections, three of the four candidates backed by the group won their races.

The committee also took Republican Gov. Scott Walker to court to successfully force special elections in June. In one of those races, a Democrat captured northeastern Wisconsin’s 1st Senate District for the first time since the 1970s.

In Wisconsin, the committee operates as an unregistered independent expenditure committee, which means it has to file election spending reports, but it does not have to disclose its contributors. The committee has spent $225,000 on electioneering in Wisconsin during the first six months of 2018. That includes $165,000 to support Rebecca Dallet’s election to the Wisconsin Supreme Court in April and another $60,000 in three legislative special elections.

Its top donors are unions and wealthy longtime Democratic donors, including:

- George Soros, a New York investment fund manager, $1.35 million
- Fred Eychaner, of Chicago, chairman of Newsweb Corp., $1 million
- American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), about $506,225
- S. Donald Sussman, a New York hedge fund manager, $500,000
- United Food and Commercial Workers Union, $500,000
- Michigan architect Jon Stryker, $200,000
Wisconsin Supreme Court Rules in Favor of Its Donors

The Wisconsin Supreme Court’s conservative majority accepted more than $37,000 in campaign contributions from health care, insurance, and business groups they sided with in a recent medical malpractice case.

The high court ruled 5-2 that the state’s limit on non-economic medical malpractice awards was constitutional. In doing so, the five-member conservative majority reduced a damage award from $15 million to $750,000 for a woman who had to have all four of her limbs amputated because doctors mishandled an infection.

Several trade groups submitted friend-of-the-court, or amicus, briefs that supported the state law’s $750,000 cap on non-economic damages.

Those organizations included Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC), the state’s largest business group; Wisconsin Hospital Association; Wisconsin Insurance Alliance; National Federation of Independent Business; Wisconsin Medical Society and numerous medical specialty groups representing psychiatrists, radiologists, anesthesiologists and others; and the Wisconsin Civil Justice Council, which is a coalition of business, construction, agricultural, and transportation groups.

Four of the five conservative justices accepted money from political action committees run by the groups. Those justices and the contributions from the group PACs were:

Justice Michael Gableman, $17,100 from WMC, Wisconsin Builders Association, and Wisconsin Hospital Association;

Justice Annette Ziegler, $12,125 from Wisconsin Builders Association, Wisconsin Medical Society, Wisconsin Insurance Alliance, Wisconsin Hospital Association, and Wisconsin Restaurant Association;

Chief Justice Patience Roggensack, $4,500 from Wisconsin Builders Association, Wisconsin Insurance Alliance, Associated Builders & Contractors, and Wisconsin Hospital Association;

Justice Rebecca Bradley, $3,500 from Wisconsin Builders Association, Wisconsin Hospital Association, Associated Builders & Contractors, and National Federation of Independent Business.

In addition to the PAC contributions from these special interest groups, Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce spent an estimated $4.5 million on outside electioneering activities to elect three of the conservative justices, including $2.2 million on Ziegler in 2007, $1.8 million on Gableman in 2008, and $500,000 on Roggensack in 2013.

Maria Butina, Scott Walker, and the NRA

Republican Gov. Scott Walker met twice in 2015 with Maria Butina, who was arrested in July for being an unregistered Russian agent.

Walker, who is seeking his third four-year term as governor in November, first met Butina in April 2015 when they both attended the National Rifle Association’s annual convention in Nashville, Tenn. In a blog post, apparently from her, she said Walker said ‘hello’ to her in Russian. She later attended the kickoff in July 2015 of his brief GOP presidential campaign.

Walker and the NRA have been cozy for years. In Wisconsin, the NRA has spent about $3.5 million to support Walker’s successful runs for governor.

The pro-gun laws approved by Walker and majority GOP legislators include the state’s concealed carry law; elimination of the 48-hour waiting period to buy a gun; and legal protection for people who shoot trespassers, which is often called the “castle doctrine.”
Read this book!

If you’re concerned about corporate power, if you’re outraged by the Citizens United decision, if you wonder how we’ve lost our democracy, then read this book: *We the Corporations: How American Businesses Won Their Civil Rights*.

It’s written breezily by Adam Winkler, a law professor at UCLA, and he shows that the Citizens United decision of 2010 “was, in fact, the culmination of a 200-year struggle for constitutional rights for corporations. ... While corporate rights reached new heights with Citizens United, the scaffolding had been built up over two centuries of Supreme Court decisions.”

“Capitalism is devouring our democracy at the national level, and crony capitalism is devouring it at the state level.”

— A quote from Matt Rothschild’s talk at the Foxconn protest in Mt. Pleasant earlier this summer.

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To join this list of sustainers who provide us with a steady and reliable flow of income, all you have to do is sign up using our online donation form at [www.wisdc.org/donate](http://www.wisdc.org/donate), or contact us at 608-255-4260 or e-mail our development associate, Evan Arnold at arnold@wisdc.org (do not include credit card information as emails are not secure), or simply let us know by using the return envelope we’ve enclosed.