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“Inspirational!”

Dear Friend,

That’s the word many people used to describe Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes’s keynote address at our annual celebration on May 16.

He joked that Gov. Evers’s motto is, “Walk softly but carry a big veto pen.” He stressed that their administration is trying to make voting easier, not harder, by backing automatic voter registration.

And he said that his own priorities are “economic justice and sustainability.” He decried the fact that “people’s zip codes determine their chances” in life. Calling for real equality of opportunity, he noted that poverty and hunger and homelessness deprive many Wisconsin kids of a fair chance.

We need to make Wisconsin a better place to live for everyone, he said, joking that “people aren’t staying here for the weather.” And he closed by saying that he and the governor are working every day to make Wisconsin a place that people can once again be proud of.



For my part, I reported that the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign is doing well financially, programmatically, and staff-wise, though I did express concern about next year’s finances, since we’re losing one foundation that had been supplying about 20 percent of our revenue. (Please use the self-addressed envelope inside to help cover this shortfall.)

Then in my filibuster before Lt. Gov. Barnes arrived, I pointed to many signs, in Wisconsin and nationally, that show that pro-democracy forces are scoring gains, despite the threats to our democracy from Donald Trump.

I’d like to thank our Outreach and Advocacy Director, Beverly Speer, for organizing the event, and retiring Board Member Marcie Brost for providing the delicious food, and member Kathleen Larson, for making several dozen tiny amazing cheesecakes and a big batch of scrumptious little ginger cookies.

A good time was had by all, and I hope you can come next year for our 25th anniversary!

Matt

We Filed a Complaint Against Hagedorn

On April 15, the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign filed a formal ethics complaint with the Wisconsin Ethics Commission against the campaign committee of Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice-elect Brian Hagedorn.

The reason: His committee failed to follow the law. State law requires legislative and statewide candidates to identify the occupations of individuals who contribute more than \$200 in a calendar year to their campaigns. But his committee neglected to provide this information for 37 percent of the contributors who gave more than \$200 in the campaign report covering donations from Feb. 5-March 18.

A campaign finance report for the same period filed by Hagedorn's opponent in the April 2 election, Appeals Judge Lisa Neubauer, contained the required occupational information for all of her contributions in excess of \$200.

In 2015, the legislature and Scott Walker changed our campaign finance law so that campaigns had to provide less information than before on their donors. They used to have to list the employers of their larger contributors, but in the rewrite, they said that campaigns only had to list occupations. The Hagedorn campaign didn't even do that for more than one-third of its larger donors.

Is it too much to ask that someone who is going to be on the Wisconsin Supreme Court follow the law?



Our Amicus Brief on the Lame Duck

In early May, the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign filed an amicus brief in the League of Women Voters case against the lame-duck session.

In our brief, we punched several holes in one of the main arguments by the Republican leadership.

That argument contends that the Legislature meets “continuously through the biennial session.” But this defense—essentially, that the Legislature is always in session until the next session begins—is “absurd,” our brief said.

The brief points out that the logic of the Republicans' argument would mean that “a lobbyist could never make campaign contributions and a legislator could never accept campaign contributions from a lobbyist.” The reason for this is simple: Current Wisconsin law allows lobbyists to make contributions only when the legislature is not in session. But since their argument is that the Legislature is always in session, they've got a big problem on their hands.

“The Legislature's theory thus requires a finding that legislators and candidates for legislative office violate the law each time they accept campaign contributions from lobbyists,” the brief states. “If true, the Legislature's own argument could lead to the mass indictment of legislators.”

And here's one for the Wisconsin taxpayer: If the Legislature serves in “continuous session,” then every legislator could put in for their “per diems” – their expense allowances – every day for two years!

The brief was filed by attorneys Jeanne Armstrong and Christopher Dodge of Fuhrman & Dodge. The Wisconsin Democracy Campaign is grateful for their excellent work on this.

Special Interest Follies

Influence Peddler: WEC Energy

Our May “Influence Peddler” award went to the WEC Energy Group. It has been the leader in political giving since 2010 among about 30 natural gas and electric utilities across the country that make campaign contributions to influence Wisconsin state elections.

WEC’s companies include Wisconsin Electric Power and Wisconsin Gas (known as We Energies), and Wisconsin Public Service. WEC is also part owner of American Transmission Co., which builds, maintains, and operates high-voltage transmission lines.

Between January 2010 and July 2018, WEC Energy Group and its companies’ executives and political action committees made \$1,041,921 in individual, PAC, and corporate campaign contributions to Wisconsin partisan legislative and statewide candidates.

Republicans, who controlled the governor’s office and legislature most of the time since 2010, received more than four times more campaign contributions than Democrats.

The top recipients between January 2010 and July 2018 were:

Former Republican Gov. Scott Walker, \$364,555

Republican Assembly Campaign Committee, about \$98,000

Committee to Elect a Republican Senate, about \$81,120

State Senate Democratic Committee, about \$42,200

Former Democratic candidate for governor Tom Barrett, about \$40,275

Top contributors from WEC and its companies between January 2010 and July 2018 were:

Gale Klappa, Milwaukee, WEC chairman of the board, \$29,900

Allen Leverett, Shorewood, WE Energies former president, \$23,300

Christopher LaRowe, Sun Prairie, WEC lobbyist, \$19,065

Larry Weyers, De Pere, former chairman of Wisconsin Public Service Corp., \$19,010

Kevin Fletcher, of Mequon, WEC Energy chief executive officer, \$17,900



Influence Peddler: Wis. Conservation Voters

Our June “Influence Peddler” award went to the Wisconsin Conservation Voters, formerly called the Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters.

The group has become one of the top spenders on electioneering activities, doling out \$3.2 million since 2010 to help elect mostly Democratic candidates to legislative and statewide offices.

The group endorses candidates and makes disclosed independent expenditures to back them. Wisconsin Conservation Voters has used a corporation, independent expenditure committee, and two political action committees (PACs) to sponsor door-to-door and telephone canvassing, get-out-the-vote activities, and broadcast advertising to support and oppose candidates.

During last fall’s legislative and statewide elections, the group spent nearly \$1.1 million on electioneering activities, including more than \$650,000 to support Democrat Tony Evers’s successful bid for governor. Wisconsin Conservation Voters then dropped \$100,000 in this spring’s nonpartisan elections to back Appeals Judge Lisa Neubauer’s unsuccessful bid for Wisconsin Supreme Court.



203 South Paterson Street, Suite 100
Madison, WI 53703-3689
608 255-4260; www.wisdc.org

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“Give Us the Cure!”

Here is the conclusion of Matt’s talk at our annual celebration on May 16:

Our mission statement, at the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, is quite simple. It goes like this: “We are dedicated to clean and open government and a full democracy, where everyone has an equal voice.”

Today, everyone doesn’t have an equal voice when the campaigns are the playgrounds of the corporations, the superPACs, and the super-rich.

Today, everyone doesn’t have an equal voice when their voting districts are rigged by gerrymandering or when they’re smothered by voter suppression.

Today, everyone doesn’t have an equal voice when there’s systemic institutional racism.

Today, everyone doesn’t have an equal voice when there’s huge discrepancies in wealth and income.

As Justice Louis Brandeis warned us many, many years 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.”

Justice Brandeis and Fighting Bob La Follette were good friends. They both understood the threat that corporate power and concentrated wealth posed to our democracy. And La Follette had no illusion that our system of checks and balances was fool-proof, and it’s being tested today by a colossal fool.

Said La Follette: “Tyranny and oppression are just as possible under democratic forms as under any other.”

But he also said, “The cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy.”

So give us the cure!

We need more democracy, in Washington.

We need more democracy, in Wisconsin.

And we need more democracy, in a hurry!