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Make People Matter



More Than Money!

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On the Web:

www.wisdc.org



WDC website gets facelift, new features

The Democracy Campaign launched a redesigned version of our website in early July, not only giving wisdc.org an updated look but also new drop-down menus to make it easier to find what you are looking for and better tools for following the money in Wisconsin politics.

Upgrades include an improved searchable database of campaign contributors allowing users to conduct more advanced searches, and a new searchable database of campaign donations from political action committees (PACs) operated by interest groups. With the new advanced search tool, users can look for donations by date and interest category in addition to searching by contributor, employer, city or candidate.

Another new feature has been added to the campaign finance profiles of legislators and statewide office holders featured on the site – the financial disclosures that state officials, candidates and appointees to state boards must file annually with the state that provide insight into their business relationships, investments, income and indebtedness.

Go to wisdc.org and give our new site a test drive, kick the tires and then let us know what you think. We'd appreciate the feedback.



Welcome to the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign

We are a nonpartisan watchdog group working for clean, open and honest government and reforms that make people matter more than money in politics.

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Searchable Database

Wisconsin's premier searchable computer database of campaign contributors to candidates for state office in Wisconsin.

Campaign 2010

Financial data for this year's campaigns for state offices.

Hijack Hotline

Help us keep track of independent expenditures and issue ads in the fall 2010 campaign.

Big Money Blog

WDC's blog with news and commentary that shine light on dark places at the Capitol.

Getting the Word Out

Television, radio, print and online efforts to raise awareness of democracy reform in Wisconsin.

WDC Events

Words, pictures and videos documenting reform rallies, town hall meetings and other special events.



What's New

Legislative races get record cash despite statewide contests
August 3, 2010

Fee speech advocates sue to block election spending disclosure
August 2, 2010

Contributor information now available for 2010 candidates
July 31, 2010

Candidates asked about ethics, other issues
July 22, 2010

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Ultra-rich shower record sums on '527' groups for smear campaigns

A tiny cadre of Wisconsin contributors – including super-rich individuals, corporations and labor unions – gave a record \$1.34 million in the first half of 2010 to political groups that specialize in smearing candidates for state and federal office with negative advertising and mailings at election time, a Democracy Campaign report issued earlier this month showed.

All the money came from just 266 donors and the top five givers supplied nearly two-thirds of the total raised by the groups, which get their name from the section of the Internal Revenue Service code under which they are organized. The Democracy Campaign tallied the amount given by Wisconsin contributors by examining the reports filed by the groups with the IRS.

The money identified in WDC's report (available online at www.wisdc.org/pr081710.php) is only part of what is being raised by mostly out-of-state political committees to fund campaign ads in Wisconsin. Even more money is being raised by advocacy groups organized under section 501(c)(4) of the IRS code as well as trade associations like chambers of commerce under section 501(c)(6). Those organizations do not have to report donations to the IRS or any other government agency.

Money chase for state legislative campaigns doubles in 8 years

Legislative candidates and their fundraising committees raised just over \$3.5 million in the first six months of 2010 – a record in an election year and more than double what they raised eight years ago, a Democracy Campaign review of the latest campaign finance reports shows.

Campaign accounts for the candidates along with four fundraising committees run by legislative leaders had more than \$5.6 million on hand as of June 30. Current office holders had a \$4-to-\$1 cash advantage over challengers.

"Politics has an economy all its own. It's not cyclical, there are no downturns. Completely recession proof. And its inflation rate bears no resemblance to the Consumer Price Index," WDC director Mike McCabe said.

State Supreme Court puts new state disclosure rules on hold

New rules aimed at requiring disclosure of interest group spending on election ads and who is funding the campaigning were set to take effect August 1 but were put on hold by the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

Even though a federal court already had exercised jurisdiction and started hearing the case, the state's high court stepped in and issued a temporary injunction preventing the state Government Accountability Board from enforcing the rules. Four of the seven members of the court also overlooked a proposed settlement of a federal lawsuit under which the GAB clarified how it would enforce the rules.

In a dissenting opinion, Justice Ann Walsh Bradley criticized the majority for granting the injunction "even though the petitioners have not requested it. By issuing this temporary injunction, four justices go above and beyond the relief sought by the petitioners."

Bradley also took the majority to task for ignoring a legal principle known as comity, which discourages multiple courts from simultaneously considering the same issues. Bradley wrote, "Given that another court has already exercised jurisdiction and held hearings on the case, most courts would at least pause to consider the rule of comity. Unfortunately, in a rush to judgment, this court fails to even mention the rule of comity let alone honor it."

Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson and Justice Patrick Crooks joined Bradley's dissent. Justices David Prosser, Annette Ziegler, Michael Gableman and Patience Roggensack formed the majority.

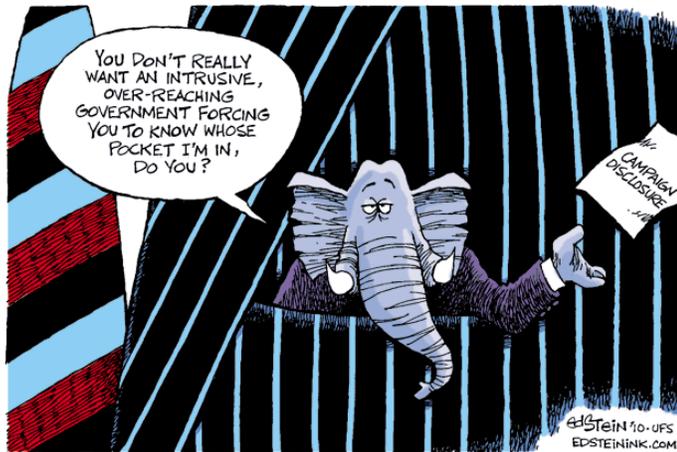
The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* said in an August 18 editorial that there "are justices who arguably owe their elections to the intercession of the kind of groups suddenly fearful of disclosure," noting that interest groups "weighed in heavily in the races of Justices Annette Ziegler and Michael Gableman...."

The first lawsuit challenging the disclosure rules was filed in federal court by the liberal group One Wisconsin Now and the conservative Club for Growth. Shortly thereafter, Wisconsin Right to Life also sued in federal court. Americans for Prosperity, several tea party groups and other right-wing organizations later asked the state Supreme Court to intervene.

GOP filibusters DISCLOSE Act

Federal legislation responding to the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC* allowing corporations and unions to spend whatever they want on elections is going nowhere for the time being thanks to unified opposition by Senate Republicans.

In late July, Senate Democrats failed to convince a single GOP senator to break ranks and could not muster the votes to end a filibuster of the legislation known as the DISCLOSE Act, which requires the biggest contributors to be identified.



State study committee examining judicial discipline and recusal

A special legislative committee was established in mid-July to study Wisconsin's system for disciplining judges who run afoul of the state judicial ethics code and to recommend new standards for when judges should be disqualified from hearing and ruling on cases.

The 12-member committee met for the first time on August 5 and heard from state Supreme Court Justices Patrick Crooks and Patience Roggensack as well as WDC director Mike McCabe and state Judicial Commission director James Alexander on judicial discipline issues. Mike has been invited by the committee to testify again on recusal issues at the committee's September 16 meeting.

The committee's formation came on the heels of the 4-3 vote on July 7 by the state Supreme Court to give final approval to new rules recommended by two powerful lobbying groups, Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce and Wisconsin Realtors Association, allowing judges to hear and decide cases involving their biggest campaign supporters.

A pick-me-up for progressives

The 9th annual Fighting Bob Fest will be held Saturday, September 11 at the Sauk County Fairgrounds in Baraboo from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Bob Fest is the largest annual political festival in the country, featuring a parade of speakers as well as music and lots to eat and drink. About 1,000 people attended the first one in 2002, and attendance has grown to more than 8,000 in more recent years.

Speakers will include the Reverend Jesse Jackson, Air America radio host Thom Hartmann, award-winning investigative journalist Greg Palast, Free Speech for People Campaign director John Bonifaz, Texas populist Jim Hightower and many others. WDC director Mike McCabe will be speaking on the main stage in the morning and also will be leading a noon breakout session on ways to fight the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC* allowing unlimited corporate election spending.

WDC will have an exhibit table in the main hall. Anyone interested in helping staff the table should contact Beverly Speer at 608-255-4260.

Big turnout for Redistricting 101

Close to 100 people took part in a July 22 educational forum on redistricting at the State Capitol, filling a fourth-floor hearing room. The Democracy Campaign helped organize the event as part of our Campaign for Accountable Redistricting. It was co-sponsored by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University Law School, George Mason University and the Midwest Democracy Network, of which WDC is a founding member.



A State Capitol hearing room was filled for a July 22 educational forum on redistricting organized by WDC and partner groups.

State high court divided on Gableman misconduct case

In the clearest indication yet of the strained relations on the Wisconsin Supreme Court, the justices deadlocked at the beginning of July on what to do about allegations of ethical misconduct by one of their own.

The court proved unable to come to a conclusion on whether Justice Michael Gableman committed judicial misconduct and incapable of enforcing the state ethics code for judges. Justices David Prosser, Annette Ziegler and Patience Roggensack blocked disciplinary action against Gableman for authorizing an untruthful campaign ad. Gableman stood accused of judicial misconduct for violating the part of the ethics code prohibiting judges from making false statements about an election opponent. Gableman's ad claimed Louis Butler "found a loophole" and

ad claimed Louis Butler "found a loophole" and implied a child molester got off on a technicality of Butler's making and "went on to molest another child."

However, the man Butler was representing as a public defender did not get off and was never released until he had served his entire sentence. Only after that did he commit another crime.

Prosser, Ziegler and Roggensack refused to conclude that Gableman's ad was untruthful. It was just "distasteful," they ruled.

WDC director Mike McCabe said in response to the decision, "The justices don't have a leg to stand on between the three of them on the truthfulness of the ad. It was way beyond distasteful. It was a lie. And a clear violation of the judicial ethics code."



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