



Big Money Bulletin

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Make People Matter



More Than Money!

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WDC puts forward 'Ending Wealthfare' plan

In early May the Democracy Campaign proposed a new campaign finance reform plan that breaks new ground on election financing and aims to replace “big-money plutocracy with a small-dollar democracy.”

Growing economic inequality in Wisconsin and across the nation is one byproduct of a corrupted political process embodied by the current system of financing elections in Wisconsin.

“The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer, and the middle class is disappearing. This is no accident. It is the result of a long series of deliberate policy decisions that add up to the establishment of a wealthfare system,” Democracy Campaign director Mike McCabe said in announcing the initiative, *Ending Wealthfare As We Know It*.

The plan creates strong incentives for candidates to seek support from the communities they will represent if elected rather than outside interests, and by incentivizing greater participation by small donors who live where the candidates are running.

The centerpieces of this reform initiative are a public matching program for small-dollar political donations, a tax credit for small contributions, significantly tighter limits on campaign giving and enhanced disclosure of campaign giving and spending as well as greater accountability for special interest electioneering groups.

Ending Wealthfare addresses a major change for the worse in Wisconsin elections, the shift away from candidate-centered campaigns to ones dominated by outside interest groups. The plan not only empowers candidates and small-dollar donors, but it also ensures that interest groups operate under the same kinds of registration, reporting and campaign financing rules as candidates by closing the “magic words” loophole in state law. And it applies the rules of democracy to corporations and other interests that have been given the ability to spend freely on elections by the U.S. Supreme Court in its ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC* by requiring them to notify their shareholders or members and obtain a majority’s authorization of any political spending.

The full plan is available on the Democracy Campaign’s website at www.wisdc.org/endingwealthfare.php. It has been endorsed by League of Women Voters of Wisconsin, the Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups, Wisconsin Farmers Union, ABC for Health, Fair Elections Wisconsin, Midwest Environmental Advocates, Wisconsin Retired Educators Association, Progressive Dane, United Council of UW Students and Young Progressives.

Clean elections fund raided to pay for voter ID implementation

On straight party lines, a state budget writing committee voted at the end of May to eliminate all funding for public financing of state elections and divert the money to help cover the cost of implementing the new law requiring voters to have a state-issued photo ID in order to cast a ballot.

Despite the fact there have been no documented instances of voter impersonation in Wisconsin, the state will be spending millions of dollars on a new state program that will disenfranchise some voters and unnecessarily burden many others.

To come up with the money, the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee voted to effectively kill the 34-year-old public financing program aimed at maintaining fair and clean elections in Wisconsin.

That program was funded by a \$1 income tax checkoff on state income tax forms. If the committee's action is approved by both houses and the governor, taxpayers who checked the box designating some of their money to public financing of elections will instead have their money used to pay for the new voter ID program.

"In effect, they are handing the keys to elections entirely over to wealthy special interests and using the money from the public financing program to fund the scheme to make it more difficult to vote," WDC director Mike McCabe said. "They are swapping clean elections for voter suppression."

TAKE ACTION!

Tell your state senator and assembly representative you object to raiding the clean elections fund to pay for voter suppression.

Call the toll-free legislative hotline (800-362-9472 or 266-9960 in Madison) to leave a message for your legislators.

Budget plan limits access to state officials' financial records

Public access to information about the finances of state officials would be further limited under a non-budgetary provision added to the state budget bill by the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee.

The motion passed May 24 would require anyone wishing to inspect or copy the statements of economic interest filed by more than 2,100 state officials to visit the state Government Accountability Board's office in Madison.

The measure would make it harder for citizens to see if their elected representative and other state officials have financial conflicts of interest.

Wisconsin already restricts access to these public records more than most states, requiring the identity of requesters to be disclosed to the officials filing the statements. That law has had a chilling effect on public requests for the information and has prevented the state from posting the records online.

Voucher backers get payback

Supporters of state-subsidized school privatization led by Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce, American Federation for Children and the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce spent \$3.36 million on mostly negative electioneering activities and direct campaign contributions to Governor Scott Walker, three fundraising committees run by legislative leaders and 66 legislators – most of them Republicans.

That was more than twice as much as opponents of the school voucher program spent to try to elect mostly minority Democrats.

Since last November's elections Walker and legislative Republicans moved quickly to reward that support with proposals to substantially expand the city of Milwaukee's 20-year-old school choice program. Republican lawmakers refused to drop school choice expansion from Walker's proposed state budget even after the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau identified it among four dozen policy items that should be considered as separate legislation. The Legislature's budget writing committee went on to approve lifting the income cap for eligibility and expanded the program to all of Milwaukee County as well as Racine and Green Bay.

WDC files complaints against recall targets for faulty disclosure

The Democracy Campaign filed complaints June 7 against three state senators targeted for recall elections for failing to disclose required occupation and employment information about major campaign donors who collectively gave them more than \$50,000.

The complaints were filed with the state Government Accountability Board against Republican Senators Randy Hopper of Fond du Lac and Dan Kapanke of La Crosse as well as Democratic Senator Dave Hansen of Green Bay.

Wisconsin law requires candidates and office holders to identify the occupation and employer of contributors whose cumulative campaign donations exceed \$100 in a calendar year. This requirement enables the public to see the financial interests of those who support candidates for state office.

Hopper's campaign reports covering the period from January 1 through April 18 failed to provide the required employer information for 23 contributions worth \$42,650. The contributions with missing information included six donations of \$5,000 each and 11 contributions of \$1,000 each. Most of the donations came from Fond du Lac and Oshkosh business executives including \$20,000 from liquor distributors with Badger Liquor and \$6,000 from executives at the contracting firm J.F. Ahern.

Kapanke failed to disclose occupation and employer information for 12 contributions totaling \$6,150 including four \$1,000 donations received between January 1 and April 18.

Hansen's campaign finance reports had missing employment information for 14 contributions totaling \$2,939 he received during the same period.

WDC, others sign letter to Obama

Working through the Midwest Democracy Network, the Democracy Campaign joined more than 30 groups from around the country in signing a letter in early May to President Barack Obama urging him to sign a proposed executive order requiring federal government contractors to disclose their political donations.

New transparency tool launched

Seeing the relationship between campaign donations and votes on key bills by Wisconsin lawmakers got easier with the April 26 launching of an online site enabling citizens to connect the dots between money and public policy decisions.

The site is the product of a partnership between the Democracy Campaign and the California-based group MapLight. This collaboration makes the information in WDC's searchable database of campaign contributors even more useful and valuable by allowing citizens to more easily connect the dots between donations to Wisconsin lawmakers and public policy decisions made by those officials. And it creates new opportunities for investigative journalism and citizen exploration of the impact of special interest money in Wisconsin politics.

To check out this new tool and give it a test drive, go to www.wisdc.org/maplight.php.

Citizens across political spectrum come together over redistricting

WDC won't be alone in keeping an eye on legislative redistricting as a group of prominent Republicans, Democrats, former journalists and academic leaders on May 26 announced the formation of **Make Our Votes Count**, a citizen committee that will be monitoring how this year's redistricting is handled in Wisconsin and advocating for a nonpartisan approach to drawing district lines in the future.

Among them are former Republican and Democratic state legislators Barbara Lorman, Margaret Lewis, Dave Martin, Kirby Hendee, Cal Potter, Stan Gruszynski, Maxine Hough and Jeff Smith as well as former Republican and Democratic cabinet secretaries and administration or party officials including Carol Skornicka, Don Percy, Bill Kraus, Chandler McKelvey, Dennis Conta, Ann Peckham, Sue Kaestner, Scott Hassett, Jeff Bartell and Naomi Gunderson Bodway.

More information about this citizen coalition can be found at makeourvotescount.com. You can add your name to the list of supporters of the effort by going to makeourvotescount.com/get-involved.

Notable quote

“Money flows freely all the time. So it does play a part in politics. I’ve seen it. I understand that folks who contribute have an easier way to get to the leadership.”

— Senator Luther Olsen, recall target

Join the small dollar democracy!

WDC’s innovative and proactive approach to campaign finance reform – *Ending Wealthfare* – seeks to replace the big money plutocracy in our state with a small dollar democracy. It is getting attention and picking up steam, but we need your help to demonstrate the power of our grassroots support. We hope you will show your support for small dollar democracy by donating \$5 today to the Democracy Ca

Campaign. You can use the enclosed reply card and return envelope to send your gift. Your support will go a long way toward helping us rid Wisconsin of what amounts to legal bribes in our elections from rich special interests that are then rewarded with wealthfare payments – tax breaks, pork barrel spending, patronage jobs and no-bid contracts for government work.

An addition to the family

As reported in the last edition of the *Big Money Bulletin*, Lenee Kruse joined our staff in March as outreach and development director. Unfortunately for us, she was lured away by an offer she couldn’t refuse from Russ Feingold’s Progressives United. Jen Rubin has been hired to succeed her on our staff. Jen comes to WDC with many years of nonprofit experience in community outreach. Welcome Jen!



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