



# Big Money Bulletin

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**On the Web:**  
**[www.wisdc.org](http://www.wisdc.org)**



## Come Celebrate Our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!

Dear Friend,

I'd like to invite you to a fun and exciting event: It's our **20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration and annual meeting** on the evening of **Wednesday, May 13**, in Madison.

Our keynote speaker is former Lieutenant Governor **Barbara Lawton**, who will be speaking on "Money in Politics: Urgent Opportunities Abound."

After her talk, she will be joined on stage by former **State Senator Dale Schultz**, who will offer his own insights about how money has corrupted our politics, and what we can do about it. And then a lively conversation with the audience—hopefully including you!—will ensue.

Our annual meetings are always enjoyable affairs, and this one should be even more so, since we're celebrating two decades of pro-democracy activism.

I hope you can make it. [Details about the event are on the back.](#)

Please help us blow out the candles on our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary cake.

Best wishes,



## Caucus Scandal Revisited

On March 17, the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign moderated a public panel on the “**Caucus Scandal Revisited: Why We Need to Keep the Government Accountability Board Impartial, Not Partisan.**” More than 50 people attended the event, which was held at the Madison Central Library.

Shane Falk, previously staff counsel for several years at the Government Accountability Board (GAB) and before that a member of the old state Elections Board, noted how widespread the corruption was during the Caucus Scandal of 2001-2002. Democratic and Republican legislative caucuses, overseen by legislative leaders in both houses, were using taxpayers’ money to campaign for state legislative candidates in obvious violation of state ethics and campaign laws.

“Everyone in the Capitol, including all the staff, were involved,” Falk said.

The other panelists warned of the grave consequences if the Republicans in the Legislature go through with their plans to remake the GAB in a partisan fashion.

“It’s an invitation to more corruption and to mischief,” said Mike McCabe, former executive director of the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign.

Jay Heck, executive director of Common Cause/Wisconsin, warned that if the Government Accountability Board is “repartisanized,” we will all regret it.

And Peg Lautenschlager, former Attorney General of the State of Wisconsin, noted that **the attacks on the GAB are but “one piece of a larger puzzle” of corruption and the dominance of money over our political system.**



*Caucus Scandal Revisited: Why we need to keep the GAB Impartial, Not Partisan—Panel members from left: Moderator Matt Rothschild, Peg Lautenschlager, Shane Falk, Mike McCabe, and Jay Heck.*

## Our Testimony on Campaign Finance Overhaul

On March 24, Matt Rothschild, the executive director of the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, testified before the Joint Informational Hearing of the Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections and the Senate Committee on Elections and Local Government. The Wisconsin Legislature is considering a top-to-bottom rewrite of our state campaign finance law.

“There is a sea of dark money that is inundating our campaigns,” Rothschild testified. “Now is no time to allow more potentially corrupting money to flow into the system.”

Rothschild added: **“We believe that elections should not be the private playground of the ultra-rich.** According to U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, ‘The top 0.01 percent of income earners are responsible for more than 40 percent of campaign contributions.’ That makes a mockery of our democracy.”

Rothschild concluded: “I urge you not to further undermine our democracy by allowing more money to pollute our system even worse than it is now. **Do not hustle us further down the dangerous road to plutocracy.**”

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## Special Interest Follies

### Switchblades, Anyone?

As though there weren't enough lethal weapons on the streets of Wisconsin already, two state legislators have introduced bills to let a quarter of a million people carry switchblades.

The bills, introduced by Republican Rep. Kathy Bernier and Sen. Terry Moulton, both of Chippewa Falls, would allow police officers, former cops, and the 240,000 people who already have a permit to carry a concealed firearm also to wield a switchblade.

The bills drew support from the Wisconsin Firearm Owners, Ranges, Clubs and Educators, a state group chartered by the NRA.

The NRA operates a political action committee and a corporation, which spent about \$58,000 on outside electioneering activities between 2011 and 2014 to help Republican legislative candidates, including \$9,823 on behalf of eight of the bills' sponsors.

### The Menard File

The mainstream press is finally paying some attention to the corrupting influence of dark money. In March, *Yahoo! News* reported that billionaire hardware store chain owner John Menard, Jr., funneled \$1.5 million to Wisconsin Club for Growth, which spent oodles of cash to help Gov. Scott Walker and Republican senators win a wave of recall elections.

Our research director, Mike Buelow, noted on the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign's website that Menard contributed \$30,000 since the beginning of 2009 to Walker and his running-mate, Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch.

**Menard has received \$1.8 million in tax credits over the last few years and a reduction in government regulation,** one of his top priorities. He was previously fined by the DNR for illegally dumping toxic trash.



### Big Dairy Gets Breaks

Republican Gov. Scott Walker's proposed 2015-17 state budget is seeking fee cuts totaling nearly \$722,000 for Wisconsin's agriculture industry, which has doled out nearly \$1.9 million in campaign contributions and outside electioneering support to help the governor win three of his past elections.

**The governor's budget calls for repealing fertilizer and plant additive fees beginning in 2016-17. It would also repeal state license fees totaling \$300,000 in 2015-17 on tankers that haul milk.**

Between January, 2010, and Oct. 20, 2014, Walker received \$1.65 million in individual and political action committee contributions from agricultural interests. **In addition to the direct contributions, a PAC controlled by the influential Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, the state's largest agricultural lobbying group, spent \$213,456 on outside electioneering activities to support Walker.**

Walker's top individual contributors from the agriculture industry between January, 2010, and Oct. 20, 2014, were Louis Gentine, a Sargento Cheese executive, and his wife, Michele, both of Elkhart Lake, \$51,000; John and Keri Vosters, of Freedom, co-owners of Milksource, \$48,500; and Todd Willer, of Freedom, a Milksource executive, \$42,500. Milksource is a company that owns numerous factory farms around Wisconsin.

## Annual Meeting and 20th Anniversary Celebration RSVP

**When:** Wednesday, May 13, 5:30-8:00PM

**Where:** Lussier Family Heritage Center,  
3101 Lake Farm Road, Madison (southeast)

**Keynote:** *Money in Politics: Urgent  
Opportunities Abound* — former Lt. Gov.  
Barbara Lawton

**Special guest:** former State Senator Dale  
Schultz (R-Richland Center)

**RSVP by Monday, May 4, to 608-255-  
4260 or [speer@wisdc.org](mailto:speer@wisdc.org).**

Look for detailed agenda and meeting  
information in a separate mailing to  
members or online at [www.wisdc.org](http://www.wisdc.org).

## Making the *Times*!

Twice in a recent two-week period, the Democracy Campaign was cited in *The New York Times*. On March 27, reporter Monica Davey wrote “Campaign Money Tests Wisconsin Justices’ Impartiality.” She noted our analysis that groups such as Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce, Wisconsin Club for Growth, and Citizens for a Strong America spent millions of dollars on ads supporting conservative justices to the Wisconsin Supreme Court. These justices are now sitting on the John Doe case that involves these very groups. Davey quoted Matt Rothschild as saying: “It boggles the mind that these justices are saying that they can somehow be impartial when these parties to the case have been essentially stuffing their pockets with huge wads of cash.”

On April 8, reporter Mitch Smith wrote “Wisconsin Re-elects Liberal Judge, but Opens Door for Conservative Chief Justice.” On the referendum question, he quoted Matt who said: “It’s a vendetta against Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson.”



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