



**For Immediate Release:**

May 31, 2012

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## **Wisconsinites Call on Barrett, Walker to Pledge ‘Special Legislative Session to Protect our Democracy’**

*Record-Breaking Campaign Spending Leaves Wisconsinites in the Dark, Candidates Notably Silent on Solutions*

**Madison** – A coalition of Wisconsin leaders and organizations is calling on Republican Governor Scott Walker and Democratic challenger Tom Barrett to pledge to the people of Wisconsin that they will take action, call a special session and provide Wisconsinites full disclosure of the source of campaign dollars and issue ads for state races and close loopholes that allow unlimited campaign fundraising.

“We might have had a short winter in Wisconsin this year, but campaign fundraising and spending has been like an avalanche for the past ten months,” said Bruce Speight, WISPIRG Director. “The people of Wisconsin have been buried in campaign ads and literature from unknown sources that exploit loopholes to funnel unlimited campaign dollars into our democracy. At the very least, Wisconsin’s gubernatorial candidates should pledge to provide Wisconsinites transparency and accountability - values core to any healthy democracy.”

In the 2011 senate recall elections, interest groups, candidates, party committees and recall committees spent a total of just under \$44 million, largely from undisclosed sources. So far in the 2012 recalls, interest groups sponsoring independent expenditures and issue ads have spent more than \$30 million and candidates for governor have spent well over \$30 million. Millions more have been spent in the senate recalls. Total recall spending in 2011 and 2012 has far surpassed the \$100 million mark.

At the same time, it is becoming increasingly difficult to track the source of these campaign dollars. In the 2012 recall elections, interest groups have reported spending more than \$25 million and most of that money was raised from anonymous donors.

"Our elections are being poisoned and the public is being kept in the dark about who's paying for most of the poison," said Mike McCabe, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign.

Wisconsin community leaders and organizations are calling on Tom Barrett and Scott Walker to pledge that they will call a special session of the legislature this summer, if elected, to advance four specific policy recommendations that would bring us closer to transparency and accountability:

1. New disclosure laws ensuring that the public can see where every single penny spent on state elections comes from.

2. Close the loophole in Wisconsin law allowing public officials targeted for recall to engage in unlimited campaign fundraising.
3. Require corporations to notify and get permission from shareholders in order to use their money for election spending.
4. Require that television, radio, and newspaper outlets keep an online public record of advertising purchased for electioneering purposes.

In the otherwise controversial arena of campaign finance, there has been a near-consensus – across the political spectrum – regarding the benefits of robust disclosure of the sources and amounts of campaign funds. In fact, in the Supreme Court’s decision in *Citizens United* Justice Kennedy affirmed the importance of disclosure, writing that it “enables the electorate to make informed decisions and give proper weight to different speakers and messages.”

“Wisconsin Farmers Union believes citizens have a right to know who might be influencing our elected officials and financing advertising campaigns,” added Katy Phillips, Wisconsin Farmers Union Communications Director. “That’s why we join with this impressive coalition in asking Scott Walker and Tom Barrett to support these four specific policy recommendations - simple and reasonable expectations crucial to a more transparent government.”

“Providing disclosure and closing loopholes in election fundraising should provide both Democrats and Republicans an opportunity to come together and do something good for democracy in Wisconsin,” said Nino Amato, President of the Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups. “On behalf of Wisconsin’s 1.2 million elderly and people with disabilities, we call on the candidates to do what’s right for our democracy and pledge that they will call a ‘special legislative session for protecting our democracy,’ if elected.”

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*WISPIRG is a statewide non-profit, non-partisan public interest advocacy organization that stands up to powerful interest. [www.wispirg.org](http://www.wispirg.org).*

*The Wisconsin Democracy Campaign is working for a real democracy that allows the common good to prevail over narrow interests. We specialize in tracking the money in state politics and work for campaign finance reform and other democracy reforms. [www.wisdc.org](http://www.wisdc.org).*