



Big Money Bulletin

Inside

Page 2

Grassroots or AstroTurf?
Stacked deck favors insiders

Page 3

WDC calls for 'Clean Sweep'
Court strikes blow for reform

Page 4

WDC in the news
New additions to WDC staff

Get Big Money



Out of Politics!

September
2002

'Free speech' costs a bundle, figures show

Local television stations in Wisconsin's three largest TV markets took in over \$4 million through Labor Day from the sale of over 12,000 political ads that have aired so far this year, according to figures obtained by the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign.

"There is nothing free about speech in political campaigns," said WDC executive director Mike McCabe.

As of September 1, candidates, political parties and special interest issue groups already had spent \$2,247,837 to air 4,114 ads in the Milwaukee TV market. While the cost of ads was highest in Milwaukee, the most ads were aired in Green Bay, where 4,473 political ads ran in the first eight months of 2002 at a cost of \$961,022. In Madison, \$815,339 was spent to air 3,487 ads.

Nationally, \$305.6 million was spent on 512,255 ads on 561 stations in the nation's top 100 markets. By Election Day the stations' haul is expected to approach \$1 billion – double the record for a non-presidential campaign year.

Public forums to examine TV's role in politics

Two public forums – one at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh on Thursday, September 26 and the other at UW-Madison on Wednesday, October 16 – will focus attention on the impact of television on today's politics. One of the topics to be explored at the forums is the movement to require broadcasters to provide free air time to political candidates. U.S. Senators John McCain and Russ Feingold announced in June that they will introduce free air time legislation as the next step in campaign finance reform.

Come add your voice....

Public Forum: *Restoring Democracy*
Thursday, September 26, 2002 – 5 p.m.
Reeve Union – Wisconsin Room (#306)
University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh

Public Forum: *The Role of Television in Politics*
Wednesday, October 16 – 7 p.m.
University of Wisconsin-Madison
(at campus location to be announced)

Grassroots support or AstroTurf?

The major party candidates for governor are getting three-quarters of their campaign contributions from an elite sliver of donors who gave \$500 or more, a Wisconsin Democracy Campaign analysis of fundraising in the first half of the year shows.

Republican nominee Scott McCallum and Democratic nominee James Doyle both boast that their fundraising prowess is an indication of broad statewide support.

“Team McCallum is the only true grassroots campaign,” the governor’s campaign said in announcing its fundraising totals.

Doyle’s camp made similar claims, saying the campaign’s “record of fundraising is a concrete expression of the strong support Jim enjoys all over the state and the strength of his campaign.”

Campaign finance reports filed by the candidates tell a different story. In the first half of 2002, Doyle got 76% of his individual contributions from donors who gave \$500 or more. McCallum relied on \$500-plus donors for 73% of his contributions. These contributors represent 3/100ths of 1% of the state’s

McCallum and Doyle are getting three-quarters of their campaign money from donors who gave \$500 or more.

These donors represent 3/100ths of 1% of the state’s taxpayers.

taxpayers.

Nearly two-thirds of the candidates’ money came from just 648 contributors who gave \$1,000 or more. Doyle relied on 194 donors who gave \$1,000 or more for 64% of his money, while McCallum got 60% of his campaign cash from 454 \$1,000-plus contributors. This group of donors represent less than 2/100ths of 1% of taxpayers.

“Their grassroots support is made of AstroTurf,” WDC director Mike McCabe said. “They haven’t received broad, statewide support from average voters, they’ve received a down payment for future services from a narrow band of fat cats.”

Stacked deck: Legislative incumbents have 16-1 cash edge

Legislative office holders who auctioned off two state budget bills to attract special interest campaign contributions built up a 16-to-1 fundraising advantage as the 2002 campaign entered the home stretch.

A Democracy Campaign analysis of campaign finance reports filed at the state Elections Board showed that legislative office holders had \$3.3 million on hand at the end of August, compared with \$211,555 held by their challengers.



Legislative office holders also raised substantially more money than challengers during the first eight months of the year – \$1.5 million versus \$547,595 – thanks to a protracted debate on a state budget adjustment bill that allowed lawmakers to pump special interests for campaign contributions in exchange for adding tax breaks and other special interest benefits to the proposal.

The largest disparity between office holders and challengers was in the Assembly where current members up for reelection held a 33-to-1 advantage. Senate incumbents held a 7-to-1 cash advantage over their challengers.

The fundraising gap goes a long way toward explaining why candidates in 57 of 116 legislative races do not have a major party opponent. In 49 races candidates are unopposed altogether, not even facing minor party opposition.

“It is a real stretch to call these democratic elections. The campaign finance system is rigged in favor of the current office holders,” said WDC’s Mike McCabe.

To find Wisconsin’s only searchable database of campaign contributors, go to www.wisdc.org.

Candidates asked to pledge ‘Clean Sweep’ of Capitol; most incumbents take the Fifth

Most current office holders went into hiding when challenged by the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign to take a public stand on key details of campaign finance reform legislation as well as other political reforms.

Overall, 103 of 271 candidates for governor, lieutenant governor and state legislature responded to the “Clean Sweep” survey. But 80% of incumbents refused to answer the questionnaire.

Of those who responded, 52 – including Democrats, Republicans, independents and third-party candidates alike – pledged to support each and every one of the 12 specific campaign finance changes and other political reforms that make up the Clean Sweep initiative.

In the pledge questionnaire, candidates were asked to support comprehensive campaign finance reform mirroring the WDC-backed Senate Bill 104 and commit to 12 specific campaign reform features.

Among the 12 are provisions addressing weaknesses in the plan passed by the legislature and signed into law by Governor Scott McCallum. These include a guaranteed source of revenue for public financing grants, a legally sound approach to issue ad disclosure, matching grants steered directly to candidates rather than funneled through the political parties, and a “severability” clause so that if any part of a reform law is found unconstitutional the whole law is not void.

Candidates also were asked to commit to:

- Elections Board reform;
- Changes to strengthen the state ethics code and lobbying law;
- Creation of a nonpartisan citizen panel to handle legislative redistricting;
- Ending the use of public funds to pay legal fees for elected officials or legislative employees under criminal investigation.

Candidates’ responses are on WDC’s web site at www.wisd.org/pr081402b.html.

Court strikes blow for reform

A federal appeals court ruled for the first time in August that a state can limit how much political candidates can spend, even if they are not receiving public funding.

In a 2-1 ruling, the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a 1997 Vermont law limiting spending by gubernatorial candidates to \$300,000. The law set lower caps for other state offices, down to as little as \$2,000 for House candidates.

In 1976, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states may not limit how much a candidate may spend unless the candidate is funded by taxpayer money. But the 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals said the 1976 Supreme Court ruling is outdated and that it is now necessary to consider “how the campaign funds race has affected public confidence and representative democracy” over the years.

The appeals court also upheld Vermont’s limits on campaign contributions. Candidates for governor, for example, may accept no more than \$400 from each contributor. (Wisconsin law allows gubernatorial candidates to accept \$10,000 from individual contributors.)

What they’re saying about the ruling

“This is an enormous victory for democracy in the United States.”

*John Bonifaz, attorney
National Voting Rights Institute*

“This is one of the most dramatic examples of judicial activism in recent history where the heart of the First Amendment, which protects the right to engage in political speech, has now been deprived by a court.”

*James Bopp, attorney for the
Vermont Republican Party and the
Vermont Right to Life Committee*

Making the paper....

When WDC challenged candidates to take a public stand on the specifics of reform legislation, 80% of incumbents refused to answer the “Clean Sweep” questionnaire. This fact caught the attention of the *Wisconsin State Journal*.

In an August 20 editorial, the newspaper congratulated office holders who “had the guts to answer the WDC’s rather pointed questions.” The editorial then named those who didn’t respond, adding there are “several reasons these elected officials might have chosen to dodge the WDC questionnaire – none of them valid.”

The *State Journal* went on to say there are “undoubtedly some questionnaires that candidates can afford to ignore – but not the WDC’s.”

New staffers on board at WDC

Diane Anderson joined the Democracy Campaign’s staff in May as financial manager. Diane is a certified public accountant with over 10 years of financial management experience in the nonprofit sector. She comes to WDC from the Wisconsin Health and Hospital Association. Diane replaces Becky Margenau, who left for a job in the private sector.

The other recent addition to the staff is new outreach director Les Wakefield. Les started work in August and replaces Paul Uebelher, who returned to anti-smoking advocacy work. Les is a former lobbyist and legislative aide who brings over 30 years of experience at the Capitol to WDC. He most recently worked on a democracy education curriculum project for the state Department of Public Instruction.

Welcome Diane and Les!



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