



Big Money Bulletin

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Get Big Money



Out of Politics!

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On the Web:
www.wisdco.org



People's Legislature draws over 1,100

The first People's Legislature drew a standing-room-only crowd of more than 1,100 citizens from across the state who met for eight hours to hammer out a plan to rehabilitate democracy in Wisconsin.

The unique multi-partisan citizen assembly was co-sponsored by the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, Fighting Bob Inc., the Center for Democratic Action and Latinos United for Change and Advancement.

Speakers included Libertarian governor candidate Ed Thompson, former Democratic governor candidate and FightingBob.com editor Ed Garvey, Democracy Campaign director Mike McCabe, former legislator Stan Gruszynski, Green Bay-area businessman Paul Linzmeyer, longtime Republican activist Carol McKy, Latino leader Alfonso Zepeda-Capistran, and the Center for Democratic Action's Carol Lobes and Judy Adrian.

Participants approved resolutions calling for reforms restoring competitive elections, clean campaigns and vigorous ethics enforcement to reopen the public square to ordinary citizens.

"The remarkable response to the idea of a People's Legislature is a testimony to the hunger for change that is growing across the state," WDC executive director Mike McCabe said.

Regional forums following up on the first statewide assembly are being held around the state. One was held in La Crosse on January 20 that was attended by close to 300 people. Others are planned for northwestern Wisconsin on Saturday, March 19 and Milwaukee on Saturday, April 30. A forum also is being organized in the Fox Valley but a date has not yet been announced.

A petition drive has been launched to build the 1,100-member People's Legislature into a statewide network of 50,000 or more.

For more on the reform agenda approved by the People's Legislature, see page two.

GET INVOLVED!

Sign the 'We Want Our Democracy Back' Petition

In this edition of the *Big Money Bulletin* is a copy of a petition supporting the reform agenda of the People's Legislature. Please circulate it in your community and help us build a statewide, grassroots movement to take back state government and revitalize democracy. Make copies of the petition and gather as many signatures as you can. Return completed petitions to: Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, 210 N. Bassett Street, Madison, WI 53703.

People's Legislature Resolutions

The 1,100-plus participants in the People's Legislature approved a four-part reform agenda, including:

1. Comprehensive campaign finance reform including public financing of state election campaigns and full and prompt disclosure of campaign contributions that restores the state's ban on corporate campaign donations.

2. Independent ethics enforcement through reform that combines the state Elections Board and Ethics Board into one enforcement agency under the direction of a politically independent board.

3. Competitive elections through reform of the way legislative redistricting is done, modeled after a system used in Iowa, to end partisan gerrymandering and create competitive voting districts; and restoration of the Fairness Doctrine requiring broadcasters to give equal time to candidates and competing points of view.

4. Preservation of local control to prevent arbitrary and centralized budgetary limits on local units of government.

Participants also approved the creation of a statewide steering committee to oversee future activities and develop four to six regional meetings of the People's Legislature.

Reform proposals introduced

Legislation has been introduced in the new session of the Legislature as **Senate Bill 1** to address ethics and campaign finance law enforcement by reforming the state Elections Board and Ethics Board.

Campaign finance reform legislation introduced as **Senate Bill 46** is scheduled for a public hearing on March 2, but the bill does not require full disclosure of campaign funds and does not include a workable system of public financing of state election campaigns. WDC is working with lawmakers in both houses on amendments to SB 46 and also an alternative bill that addresses these deficiencies.

A soon-to-be-introduced Assembly resolution will direct the Joint Legislative Council to study and recommend legislation providing legislative and congressional redistricting by an independent citizen commission.

28 groups back reform agenda

A coalition of more than two dozen public interest groups collectively representing hundreds of thousands of Wisconsin citizens has endorsed a reform agenda virtually identical to the one approved by the People's Legislature.

The coalition gave its stamp of approval to the Democracy Campaign's "Power to the Voter" agenda that calls for full disclosure of campaign funds, comprehensive campaign finance reform, improved ethics and campaign finance law enforcement, redistricting reform and election reform allowing rank-order voting such as Instant Runoff Voting.

Organizations supporting the agenda include: AARP, American Association of University Women of Wisconsin, AFT-Wisconsin, Associated Students of Madison, Citizens for a Scenic Wisconsin, Citizens' Utility Board, Clean Water Action Council, Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups, Coalition for Wisconsin Health, Economic Justice Institute, Lake Winnebago Greens, League of Women Voters of Wisconsin, League of Wisconsin Municipalities, Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin, National Association of Social Workers in Wisconsin, Progressive Dane, River Alliance of Wisconsin, Survival Coalition, United Council of UW Students, Wisconsin Citizen Action, Wisconsin Council of the Blind, Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, Wisconsin Council on Developmental Disabilities, Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters, Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice, Wisconsin Public Interest Research Group and Wisconsin Retired Educators' Association.

More information on the reform agenda is available online at: www.wisdc.org/powertothevoter.html

WDC opposes TABOR

The Democracy Campaign's board of directors in December acted to put WDC on record in opposition to a proposed constitutional amendment known as the "Taxpayer Bill of Rights" (TABOR) and formally join a growing coalition of state groups opposed to the initiative.

Legislative spending sets record

Spending on state legislative races in 2004 totaled about \$16.6 million, smashing the old record even though nearly half the candidates faced little or no opposition, a Wisconsin Democracy Campaign analysis shows.

Candidates and four legislative campaign committees controlled by legislative leaders combined to spend \$9.94 million in 2004, up 18% from the \$8.39 million they spent in 2000 and up 34% from the

In the most competitive races, special interest group spending on campaign ads far surpassed what the candidates spent on their own campaigns.

\$6.28 million spent in 1996.

Special interest groups spent \$6.65 million in 2004 on their own campaigns for or against legislative candidates. That was even more than the \$6.6 million spent on such electioneering in 2002, which featured a \$23 million race for governor. It was 33% more than the \$5 million groups spent in 2000 and 454% more than the \$1.2 million they spent in 1996.

Winning candidates sharply outspent losing candidates – \$5.1 million to \$3.7 million. Those who spent the most money won 101 of 115 legislative races – 89 of 99 in the Assembly and 12 of 16 races in the Senate.

An extreme example of the financial advantages of incumbency was Republican Assembly Speaker John Gard's campaign to keep his northern Wisconsin 89th District seat. Gard set a new record for spending in an Assembly race – \$219,296 – even though he faced two opponents who spent a combined \$13,221.

In the most competitive races, interest group spending far surpassed what candidates spent on their own campaigns. For example, in the 22nd Senate District race pitting incumbent Democrat Robert Wirth against Republican challenger Reince Priebus, total campaign spending was an estimated \$2.2 million. Special interests accounted for an estimated \$1.7 million of that in issue advertising and independent expenditures. Wirth, who won, and Priebus

Priebus spent a combined \$531,081.

Another race hijacked by special interests was for the open seat in the 32nd Senate District where groups outspent the candidates by a 2-to-1 margin. The race's total price tag was \$1.5 million. Special interest issue ads and independent expenditures in the race totaled about \$1 million, compared to the combined \$480,038 spent by Republican Dan Kapanke, who won, and Democrat Brad Pfaff.

Legislative fundraising and spending continue to break records despite a decline in the number of contested races over the years. In 1970, there were no uncontested legislative races and as recently as the mid-1980s only one in seven races was uncontested. In 2004, candidates had little or no opposition in 44% of races.

WDC's TV ad airs statewide

A unique animated television ad featuring a stinging indictment of dysfunctional state government and a call to action on behalf of political reform aired over 30 times in late January and early February on television stations across the state.

The ad features award-winning political cartoonist Mike Konopacki's depiction of a fiddler with two heads – an elephant's and a donkey's – and a Capitol engulfed in flames.



It aired on local evening newscasts on five stations in Milwaukee, Green Bay, Madison, Eau Claire and Wausau. It also aired once during a University of Wisconsin men's basketball game against Penn State on stations in Madison, Milwaukee, Green Bay and La Crosse. And it aired during morning newscasts, on "Meet the Press" and "Jeopardy" on another Madison station.

If you have not seen the ad you can watch it on our web site at www.wisdc.org/stopfiddling.html.

Thank you to all who contributed to help us reach the largest possible audience with our message.

From the executive director

If you didn't see the Democracy Campaign's TV ad, it aimed to say as much as you can in 30 seconds about how our state lawmakers play political games on phony wedge issues that only further divide us while burning issues like the 600,000 people in Wisconsin without health insurance, the 59% of African American men in Milwaukee who are unemployed and the political corruption scandal that produced four dozen felony charges are left unaddressed.

What we're seeing so far in the new legislative session only serves to reinforce the ad's commentary. Early indications point to a replay of last session's sorry spectacle of hopelessly polarized political leaders avoiding the tough problems and delighting in scoring points on divisive social issues.

Look for the state to continue paying more for failure than it invests in success, as it appears all but certain that the budget increase for prisons will once again be larger than the funding increase for the university system.

The evidence of a dysfunctional state government that inspired the Democracy Campaign's TV ad is what also led the People's Legislature to call for a top-to-bottom cleanup of the state political process.

Yet the powers-that-be at the State Capitol are steadfastly protecting corrupt campaign funding that even Mississippi's Trent Lott calls "sewer money."

Think about it. Wisconsin's leaders are now a step behind Trent Lott on campaign financing – the most important civil rights issue of our time. If that's not a wake-up call, I don't know what is.

— *Mike McCabe*



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