



# Big Money Bulletin

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Get Big Money



Out of Politics!

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



## People's Legislature moves to Milwaukee

The next stop for the People's Legislature is southeastern Wisconsin, where a regional meeting of this unique multi-partisan citizen assembly will be held on **Saturday, April 30** from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the United Community Center in downtown Milwaukee.

The first People's Legislature was held in Madison on January 4 and 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 clean up politics in Wisconsin and rehabilitate democracy in the state.

Regional forums following up on the first statewide assembly already have been held on January 20 in La Crosse, where close to 300 people participated, and on March 19 in Cable, which drew 100 northern Wisconsin residents. In addition to the Milwaukee forum on April 30, a forum is being organized in the Fox Valley but a date has not yet been established.

The People's Legislature is co-sponsored by the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, Fighting Bob Inc., the Center for Democratic Action and Latinos United for Change and Advancement. More information is available online at [www.peopleslegislature.org](http://www.peopleslegislature.org).

## GET INVOLVED!

You can register in advance for the April 30 Milwaukee forum online at [www.peopleslegislature.org/html/register.html](http://www.peopleslegislature.org/html/register.html) or you can register at the door on the day of the event. For a map and driving directions to the United Community Center and other information about the Milwaukee People's Legislature, go to [www.peopleslegislature.org/html/milwaukee\\_wi\\_region.html](http://www.peopleslegislature.org/html/milwaukee_wi_region.html).

### Take Action in Support of the People's Legislature

If you haven't already done so, sign the "We Want Our Democracy Back" petition supporting the reform agenda of the People's Legislature. You can do this and also learn about other opportunities to take action to help us build this statewide, grassroots movement to take back state government and restore democracy online at [www.peopleslegislature.org/html/take\\_action.html](http://www.peopleslegislature.org/html/take_action.html). Or call us at 608-255-4260 or toll-free at 888-455-4260.

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## Economic aid steered to donors

Millions of dollars a year in aid meant to help low and middle income people get good-paying jobs are being diverted by the state to corporate welfare, with by far the biggest handouts going to contributors to state election campaigns, a recent Wisconsin Democracy Campaign study shows.

The report, “*Serving the Have-Mores,*” shows how campaign contributions have changed the way government does business. Programs designed to help start-up businesses, struggling farmers and those living in poverty are used instead to help the likes of Wal-Mart, General Motors, Procter & Gamble and

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***Recipients of state economic aid who made campaign contributions received awards averaging \$1 million. Those who did not make donations got aid averaging less than \$130,000.***

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Home Depot, as well as factory farms and affluent communities.

The Democracy Campaign reviewed more than 5,100 state Commerce Department grants, low-interest loans and tax credits awarded between 1999 and September 2004 and found:

- Campaign donors received grants, subsidized loans and tax credits *eight times larger* than non-contributors. Contributors got awards averaging \$1.04 million, while non-donors got aid averaging \$129,990.
- Wal-Mart, the world’s largest retailer that reported \$9 billion in profits in 2003, has received \$2.2 million in state commerce and transportation aid and \$7.8 million in local aid and tax breaks since 1999.
- The state used money intended to help “economically distressed” areas to help Norlight Communications build new corporate headquarters in the affluent suburb of Brookfield. Brookfield ranks in the top 10 among Wisconsin communities that generate the most campaign contributions.
- The state doled out \$16.6 million in agricultural develo

development aid, most of which went to four dozen corporate factory farms. A Northern Ireland factory farm investor described by state officials as having “significant net worth” was handed a \$1.1 million low-interest state loan to buy a mammoth Winnebago County dairy operation. The jobs to be created pay less than \$11 an hour with no benefits.

- No evidence of state audits or site visits to determine whether the recipients of state aid were spending the money properly or creating the promised jobs.

The full study is available on WDC’s web site at [www.wisdc.org/pr031605.php](http://www.wisdc.org/pr031605.php).

## Environmental deregulation bills on fast track thanks to donations

Two bills relaxing environmental regulations and limiting the financial and legal liability of polluters received a public hearing before they were even formally introduced and a mere 17 hours after preliminary drafts were made public. The legislation was then approved by a State Assembly committee a week later and was passed by the full Assembly five days after that.

Industry backers of the two bills they call the “Job Creation Act II” have contributed nearly \$9 million to legislators and the governor. Republicans who control both houses of the Legislature have received nearly 13 times more campaign money from supporters of the legislation than from the bills’ opponents.

Governor Jim Doyle has received \$2.02 million from big business and other wealthy supporters of the deregulation measures who traditionally support Republicans, or 26% more than he has accepted from the bills’ opponents who are usually Democratic allies.

Other top recipients of campaign donations from the bills’ backers include indicted former Republican Assembly Speaker Scott Jensen, who has received more than \$315,000, and current Assembly Speaker John Gard, who has accepted nearly \$213,000.

The full report is available online at [www.wisdc.org/pr041205.php](http://www.wisdc.org/pr041205.php).

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## Watered-down campaign reform legislation defeated in senate

A bipartisan campaign finance reform bill, substantially weaker than versions offered in past sessions, was rejected 20-13 by the state Senate on March 16.

When sponsors of the legislation, Senate Bill 46, removed key reform provisions before introducing the bill this session, it was done with an eye toward winning more votes in a decidedly anti-reform Legislature.

To make the legislation more palatable to reform opponents, a provision requiring full disclosure of the source of funds used to pay for special interest campaign ads was pulled out. The change would have allowed unlimited corporate contributions, illegal in Wisconsin since 1906, to be used for

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***The weakened reform bill allowed unlimited corporate donations and did not adequately fund the promised public grants to candidates who agree to limit their campaign spending.***

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electioneering. SB 46's sponsors also reduced the amount of public financing of state elections from 45% to 35% of campaign costs and removed a key funding source for those public grants as well as supplemental grants candidates would have been eligible for to answer special interest attacks.

The Democracy Campaign testified that the changes rendered the bill ineffective and unworkable.

Believing that weakening the bill would make it more likely to pass, supporters beat back amendments to require full disclosure and adequately fund the bill.

A stronger version of the bill passed the Senate on a 25-8 vote in 2002 but was not taken up by the Assembly.

SB 46's sponsors plan to come back with a revised bill in the fall. A bill identical to SB 46 was introduced in the Assembly as AB 226, ironically on the same day SB 46 was rejected by the Senate.

## Doyle, Lautenschlager propose election, government reforms

Governor Jim Doyle broke his long silence on how elections are conducted in Wisconsin when he offered an election reform plan, ironically on April Fool's Day. Among his ideas is a call for legislative districts to be drawn by the nonpartisan Legislative Reference Bureau and the merger of the state Elections Board and Ethics Board into a single enforcement agency.

Meanwhile, Attorney General Peg Lautenschlager proposed a government reform initiative calling for a ban on campaign donations by government contractors, an overhaul of the ethics and elections boards, and reform of congressional and legislative redistricting, among other reforms.

Reforming redistricting and the ethics and elections boards are on WDC's "Power to the Voter" agenda and the reform agenda of the People's Legislature.

## CSW golf outing set for August

You can help Community Shares of Wisconsin help the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign by participating in CSW's 11th annual Golf Classic on August 12 at The Meadows of Six Mile Creek. The cost is \$95 for a single participant or \$340 for a pre-registered foursome. For more information or to reserve a spot, contact Donna Chan Fisher at **608-577-7171** or [dcfisher@execpc.com](mailto:dcfisher@execpc.com).

CSW is a social action fund that financially assists local advocacy organizations through workplace giving programs and other fundraising. WDC became a member agency in 2004.



## Happy Birthday, WDC!

This year marks the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign's 10th anniversary. Two small ways we are ushering in our second decade of pushing democracy in Wisconsin are the new logo that appears on this edition of the *Big Money Bulletin* and our redesigned web site.

In overhauling the web site, we aimed not only to give it a new look but also to make it even more user-friendly. If you haven't already seen it, check it out at [www.wisdc.org](http://www.wisdc.org) and let us know what you think.

In our first 10 years, the Democracy Campaign has compiled a long list of accomplishments. We created and continue to maintain Wisconsin's only searchable computer database of campaign donors, giving citizens the ability to follow the money in state politics. We've produced a vast storehouse of research documenting the corruption of Wisconsin politics. And we successfully fought for the enactment and

implementation of political sunshine legislation called the "Citizens Right to Know" law.

We triggered criminal investigations of corruption at the Capitol and then worked to get legislation enacted abolishing the corrupt legislative caucus offices. In the wake of the caucus scandal, we got a "pay to play" ban enacted making it a felony for lawmakers to trade official actions for campaign donations.

We were responsible for fines levied against wealthy donors and politicians, tougher new enforcement policies and improved compliance with campaign finance laws. And we've pressured local broadcasters into improving election coverage. The list goes on and on....

For more on what we've been up to these last 10 years, go to [www.wisdc.org/wdcaccomplishments.php](http://www.wisdc.org/wdcaccomplishments.php).

And we're just getting warmed up!



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