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Get Big Money



Out of Politics!

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Accenture lawsuit yields important victory

Despite the fact a circuit court judge earlier this month threw out a lawsuit filed by the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign's director and other citizens seeking cancellation of the state's voter-list contract with the global outsourcing firm Accenture, the lawsuit succeeded in extracting key concessions from Accenture and the state.

The lawsuit forced the state to address public concerns about the confidentiality of voter records and the ability of state officials to access Accenture's proprietary software. Changes are being made requiring Accenture to provide access to underlying computer source code used to develop the voter list and ensure that confidential voter information will not be copied or sold.

Ruling in *McCabe v. Kennedy*, Judge William Foust held that state Elections Board director Kevin Kennedy did not have the authority to enter into the \$14 million agreement with Accenture to develop a statewide voter registration list. But Foust nevertheless upheld the contract by ruling that the board retroactively ratified the contract by voting to approve it more than a month after the lawsuit was filed.

Ironically, the court ruling affirms a contract that neither the state nor Accenture intends to honor. Accenture already has asked to push back deadlines the company says it can't meet, eliminate several contractual obligations it says are no longer necessary, and increase payments from the state for some work. Kennedy agrees the contract needs to be rewritten and says he won't rule out paying Accenture more.

Democracy Campaign's whistle blowing yields sharp drop in contribution limit violations

The number of wealthy donors who violate the \$10,000 annual limit on total contributions to state and local campaigns dropped to just one in 2004. That is the lowest number of violators since 1999 and is a dramatic decrease from the high of 39 individuals who exceeded the donation limit in 2002.

The plummeting number of contributors who run afoul of the law follows an annual effort by the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign to publicly identify violators and prod the state Elections Board to enforce the limit on donations. The Democracy Campaign began filing formal complaints in 2003, which resulted in about \$7,800 in fines against wealthy contributors. More on WDC's efforts to blow the whistle on illegal donations is available online at www.wisdc.org/pr042705.php.

Wal-Mart, other big companies leech off state health care plan

State taxpayers are picking up about \$6.4 million a year in health insurance costs for 10 corporations led by Wal-Mart and ironically Aurora Health Care that do not offer health care benefits to 2,900 of their employees and dependents. These employees are forced to enroll in BadgerCare, the state's taxpayer-supported health care program for the poor.

The top 10 corporate users of state-paid health insurance for their employees have given \$330,267 in campaign contributions to candidates for statewide office and the Legislature since 1993. Business interests supporting corporate abuse of BadgerCare

Business interests that oppose proposed legislation requiring large companies to reimburse the state for providing insurance to their workers have made \$14.3 million in campaign contributions to current legislators.

and opposing proposed legislation to require large companies to reimburse the state for providing insurance to their workers have contributed \$14.3 million to current legislators. Most of the donations – nearly \$11.5 million – has gone to Republicans who control both houses of the Legislature.

The revelations relating to BadgerCare come on the heels of a Democracy Campaign study released in March showing that 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.

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

Campaign donors received grants, subsidized loans and tax credits eight times larger than non-contributors. Contributors got awards averaging

or tax credits averaging \$1.04 million, while non-donors got aid averaging \$129,990.

Wal-Mart has received \$2.2 million in state commerce and transportation aid and \$7.8 million in local aid and tax breaks since 1999.

Proposed budget hikes 'graft tax'

While state officials continue to spin the proposed state budget as a "no-tax-increase" plan that even promises to slice a few dollars from tax bills thanks to a "property tax freeze," a Wisconsin Democracy Campaign study shows that ordinary taxpayers are being played for fools.

The competing "tax freezes" offered by Governor Jim Doyle and legislative Republicans purport to save the average taxpayer anywhere from \$3 to \$10. But a host of increased fees, pork barrel projects and new breaks for business tucked in the dark recesses of the proposed budget would cost each taxpayer over \$100 a year.

The latest in a series of "Graft Tax" reports by the Democracy Campaign, entitled *Playing Peter to Pay Paul*, identifies items in the budget and other proposed bills that would cost taxpayers at least \$458 million – or \$118 per taxpayer each year. This is in addition to special interest perks and policy favors to big campaign donors identified in WDC reports two years ago that cost each Wisconsin taxpayer \$1,358 annually.

Donors who stand to benefit from the items identified in the most recent report have contributed over \$7.4 million to Doyle, including \$6.2 million since 2002 when he ran for governor. They also have given current legislators \$18.2 million since 1993, including more than \$12.6 million to Republicans who control the Legislature.

The full report is available on WDC's web site at www.wisdc.org/pr052505.php. The Democracy Campaign is tracking the fate of the items in a web-based feature called the Graft Tax Scorecard at www.wisdc.org/graft_tax_scorecard2005.pdf.



People's Legislature road show hits Milwaukee, Green Bay area

More than 200 people signed up to become part of the People's Legislature movement on April 30 in Milwaukee and over 100 more participated in the May 21 citizen assembly in a dance hall and bowling alley outside the Green Bay-area town of Luxemburg.

The southeast Wisconsin forum was the cover story in Milwaukee's *Shepherd Express*. The weekly newspaper's story, headlined "The Grassroots Are Back," quotes a weblog posting by a People's Legislature participant, who said "*It was inspiring as hell, real democracy in action.... People are not rolling over and playing dead. Far from it. Today was one of the most positive, most inspiring, and most effective group sessions of any kind that I've ever witnessed. People are so eager to pitch in and help get things back on track.*"

The People's Legislature is inspiring the creation of new grassroots networks of citizen activism in local communities. One example is Grassroots of Waukesha, formed by two women who attended the first People's Legislature on January 4. The group's web site is www.grassrootswaukesha.org.

In addition to the January 4 assembly in Madison that drew over 1,100 people and the regional forums in Milwaukee and Luxemburg, the People's Legislature also has met in La Crosse and Cable.

In a prolonged open forum at the Milwaukee assembly, participants raised a host of issues – from prison reform and health care to the role of private agencies in implementing the W-2 welfare program and protection of the Great Lakes. But in the end, the prevailing sentiment was that the People's Legislature should remain focused on the core pro-democracy reforms outlined in the original four resolutions adopted by the first statewide assembly.

The Green Bay-area forum, which featured local speakers including Libertarian Roy Leyendecker, Green Party activist Jill Bussiere and League of Women Voters member Mimi Dobbins, came to the same conclusion. After discussing a broad range of issues for nearly seven hours, the Green Bay forum affirmed the political reform resolutions and came up with a five-point plan to organize and take action locally to build the People's Legislature movement.

Proposals reflecting People's Legislature priorities introduced

Proposed legislation introduced as Senate Bill 1 to create independent ethics enforcement by overhauling the state Elections Board and Ethics Board received a public hearing in mid-May and is expected to get committee approval this month and proceed to the full Senate. Independent ethics enforcement is a top reform priority of the People's Legislature and the Democracy Campaign.

Legislation addressing another priority of the People's Legislature and WDC – campaign finance reform including public financing of state elections and full disclosure of all campaign activity – has been introduced as Assembly Bill 392. AB 392 is the same as last session's Senate Bill 12, which was sponsored by seven Republican and 16 Democratic legislators and supported by WDC.

Proposals to reform legislative redistricting have been introduced as Assembly Joint Resolution 22 and Assembly Joint Resolution 41.

New pledge program makes giving to WDC easier than ever

Enclosed in this edition of the *Big Money Bulletin* is a form describing convenient new ways to financially support the Democracy Campaign. The pledge program allows members to sign up to make automatic monthly or quarterly donations by credit card or electronic funds transfer.

Reminder:

Community Shares golf outing

Another way to support the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign is through Community Shares of Wisconsin, a social action fund that financially assists local advocacy organizations through workplace giving programs and other fundraising. WDC became a member agency in 2004.

You can help CSW help the 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.

If I am not fed, I will not listen

Green Bay-area Senator Alan Lasee last month proposed legislation to allow legislators – who are paid \$45,569 a year plus an \$88 a day spending allowance when they are in Madison on legislative business – to eat and drink for free at parties thrown by certain special interest groups including chambers of commerce, tourism and convention interests and others.

After the “wine and dine” bill was condemned by the Democracy Campaign and other citizen groups and was savaged by talk radio hosts and newspaper editorialists across the state, Lasee withdrew the proposal.

But he remains convinced that if lawmakers have to pay for food and drink they will not attend events.

“I’m not paying \$15 to go and listen to somebody from another part of the state lobby me. You can only take so

another part of the state lobby me. You can only take so much abuse,” Lasee says.

Apparently, his colleagues have no such hang-ups, especially when the party is thrown by groups that lend a hand at election time. For instance, anti-abortion lobby Wisconsin Right to Life charged \$30 a head for lunch at its February 10 legislative conference and over 40 legislators attended.

I give, and I am fed

“(M)y family is the largest single contributor...to the national Republican Party.... I have decided, however, to stop taking offense at the suggestion that we are buying influence. Now, I simply concede the point. We expect a return on our investment....”

— Betsy DeVos, the matron of a Michigan family that runs the right-wing front group All Children Matter that seeks to influence Wisconsin elections



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