



Big Money Bulletin

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Out of Politics!

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Moment of truth arrives on ethics reform

Ethics reform legislation strongly supported by the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign has cleared several legislative hurdles and now only needs approval by the full Assembly before it can go to Governor Jim Doyle's desk. Doyle already has signaled his support for the legislation, **Senate Bill 1**, which calls for strengthening ethics enforcement by replacing the dysfunctional state Elections Board and Ethics Board with a politically independent Government Accountability Board with the authority to investigate and prosecute wrongdoing.

Less than a week after a People's Legislature rally for reform at the Capitol, the state Senate passed SB 1 on a bipartisan 28-5 vote. Then two days after the People's Legislature held the first-ever "public telling" to shine the spotlight on Capitol corruption and challenge the state's top leaders to take a stand on reform, SB 1 was given a hearing in an Assembly committee. After supporters beat back attempts to weaken the bill in committee, SB 1 got the committee's approval on a 5-1 vote on March 2 and it was supposed to be scheduled for a vote in the full Assembly during the Legislature's session that ended March 9.

Assembly leaders opted to pull SB 1 from the lower house's agenda and delay the vote, but promised that the bill would be taken up during a two-week session to be held from April 25 to May 4. While the delay was a bitter disappointment, the Democracy Campaign and other SB 1 backers are working to hold Assembly leaders to their promise.

Take Action on Ethics Reform

Call your state representative in the Assembly and Majority Leader Mike Huebsch and tell them it's time to put teeth in enforcement of Wisconsin's ethical standards. Urge them to make sure Senate Bill 1 is scheduled for a vote and is passed by the full Assembly.

Call the Legislative Hotline
1-800-362-9472 (266-9960 in Madison)

Call Mike Huebsch
608-266-2401 or 888-534-0094

Jensen convicted of felonies

Once one of the most powerful politicians in Wisconsin, Scott Jensen now is destined to spend time behind bars. A citizen jury found the former Assembly speaker guilty on March 11 of three felony charges of criminal misconduct in public office and one misdemeanor ethics charge.

Jensen announced his resignation from the state Assembly on March 13. He is due to be sentenced in mid-May. He faces up to 16 years in prison, substantial fines and restitution.

The Waukesha Republican masterminded the GOP's takeover of the Legislature's lower house. His blueprint for seizing power, however, involved illegally turning state staff, offices and equipment into a massive, secret campaign machine.

Jensen previously had worked as former Governor Tommy Thompson's chief of staff. He also once worked for the powerful business lobby group Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce.

He became the fifth top state lawmaker to be convicted on corruption charges stemming from an investigation the Democracy Campaign helped trigger into illegal campaigning by the Legislature's partisan caucuses. After the investigation was launched in 2001, the caucus offices were abolished.

When Jensen took the stand in his own defense, prosecutors caught him in several lies. Jensen's testimony under oath conflicted with statements he made to law enforcement officials during the investigation.

The inconsistencies in Jensen's stories didn't seem to bother state Supreme Court Justice David Prosser, who testified as a character witness on Jensen's behalf and praised Jensen as trustworthy and honest. When asked by prosecutor Brian Blanchard if his opinion would change if he knew Jensen had lied to law enforcement agents, Prosser answered "no."

During jury selection before the trial started, prospective jurors were questioned about their knowledge of the case. Among the questions they were asked was whether they were members of the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, the People's Legislature or Common Cause in Wisconsin.

Foti sentenced, will still lobby

Former Assembly Majority Leader Steve Foti was sentenced late last month to 60 days in jail after pleading guilty to a reduced charge in exchange for his agreement to testify against ex-colleague Scott Jensen.

The Oconomowoc Republican was originally charged more than three years ago with felony misconduct in public office and faced up to five years in prison if convicted of that charge. Under the plea agreement, he admitted to a misdemeanor charge, which would allow him to continue working as a lobbyist even if a bill working its way through the Legislature that prohibits felons from lobbying at the Capitol were to be enacted.

Even as he heads to jail, Foti remains licensed to lobby state government and he said he plans to continue working on behalf of clients including Miller Brewing Company and several trade associations while serving his sentence. Just two days after his sentencing, Foti signed up another client – Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America.

Foti's sentence was more harsh than the recommendation prosecutors and defense attorneys negotiated in the plea agreement. The judge in the case doubled the recommended jail time and justified the stiffer punishment by saying he felt Foti had been uncooperative and less than truthful in his testimony against Jensen after agreeing to be a witness against his friend and former colleague as part of the plea deal.



Democracy forum ignites activism

More than 30 citizens from the La Crosse area gave up a Saturday morning on March 25 to search for an antidote to what ails our political process. They took part in a democracy forum held on the Viterbo University campus. The event was sponsored by the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign and the League of Women Voters.

The session produced plans to create new activist networks, letter-writing campaigns and a petition drive to demonstrate support in the Coulee region for ethics reform and campaign finance reform legislation.

Featured speakers at the forum included Democracy Campaign director Mike McCabe, former Democratic state legislator and La Crosse mayor John Medinger and former Republican state lawmaker and WDC member Dave Martin.

New Web feature to track special interests' shadow campaigns

In this election year, a feature of the Democracy Campaign's web site called "Hijacking Campaign 2006" will be devoted to monitoring the activities of special interest groups seeking to influence state elections.

Front groups like All Children Matter, Americans for a Brighter Tomorrow, Alliance for a Working Wisconsin and Independent Citizens for Democracy have poured huge sums of money into shadow campaigns in recent years in an effort to tip the scales in key state races. Because they are unregulated, they enable big-money interests to skirt disclosure requirements and get around campaign contribution limits.

In addition to monitoring campaign donations to candidates for state office this year, the Democracy Campaign will be trying to keep tabs on these stealth campaigns. You can help by using our online "Hijack Hotline" at www.wisdc.org/hijackline.php to alert us to television, radio or newspaper ads, highway billboards, phone calls or automated messages and direct mail appeals sponsored by these groups. If you don't have Internet access, call us at **608-255-4260** or toll-free at **888-455-4260**.



Doyle vetoes rent-to-own bill

Governor Jim Doyle surprised many observers, including consumer advocates, when he vetoed legislation that would have exempted rent-to-own companies from state consumer protection laws. Doyle was widely expected to sign the bill even though he once sued the industry as attorney general and condemned similar legislation in the past.

As all indications pointed toward the governor giving the bill his blessing, the Democracy Campaign released findings that Doyle had received \$22,500 in campaign donations from interests supporting the rent-to-own legislation, including the owners of several rent-to-own firms and two companies that supply the rental outlets – Ashley Furniture and General Electric.

The industry also made nearly \$26,000 in donations to key legislators since 2003 leading up to the bill's passage by the Legislature. The legislation was initially rejected on a 18-15 vote in the Senate last November, but the Senate reconsidered its vote and approved it 18-14 last month after Eau Claire Republican Ron Brown reportedly told Senate GOP colleagues he needed the bill passed to help his re-election campaign.

The rent-to-own deregulation bill then sailed through the Republican-controlled Assembly before Doyle vetoed it.

Reacting to the governor's veto, Eau Claire rent-to-own store owner Jeff Lebakken told one newspaper that while he was disappointed in Doyle's decision he appreciated the governor's willingness to work with the industry. He went on to say "as everyone else does when making contributions, they're making them based on who is in the best position to do what you're hoping to get done."

Lebakken also said "I don't question that this legislation will at some point get passed in this state."

Get the Lowdown.

Read the Big Money Blog.

www.wisdc.org/blog/bigmoneyblog.html

Walker ends bid for governor

Count Scott Walker as the latest victim of the wealth primary. Walker's announcement that he was bowing out of the 2006 governor's race because he could not raise enough money to compete with either fellow Republican Mark Green or Democrat Jim Doyle is the latest sobering evidence of how many people are being priced out of the political arena. If someone as well-connected and well-heeled as Scott Walker can't compete financially, who can?

Say cheese!

Mark Green, now the lone Republican running for the state's highest office, has been linked to convicted lobbyist Jack Abramoff, indicted former U.S. House leader Tom DeLay and the state legislative caucus scandal. He no doubt is counting on Wisconsin voters to overlook those ties, not to mention donations he's received from indicted Illinois wheeler dealers Nick

Hurtgen and Stuart Levine, convicted former Democratic finance chairman Joseph Cari and a Chicago lawyer with publicly chronicled mob ties. But will voters in America's Dairyland be in a forgiving mood about the \$845 Green recently accepted from a salesman for the California-based Pacific Cheese Company? After all, the sale of margarine was banned at one time in Wisconsin.

Stripping for family values

Speaking of donations from unmentionable sources, one of Assembly Republican Leader Mike Huebsch's contributors certainly got our attention. Huebsch is a graduate of fundamentalist Oral Roberts University and a chief architect of the GOP's family-values agenda critics have dubbed "God, Guns and Gays."

The great lengths to which Huebsch goes to cultivate a choir-boy image made it all the more surprising that he recently accepted \$250 from Ambrose Schwartz, the owner of a Fountain City strip joint called the 4-Mile Gentlemen's Club.



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