



Big Money Bulletin

Inside

Page 2

Ethics questionnaire gets response
5-state survey shows faith in reform

Page 3

TV ignores democracy
Help Community Shares help WDC
Legislative fundraising sets record

Page 4

Seen and unseen weapons
Citizen Dominion

Get Big Money



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WDC's position prevails, PAC money ruled illegal, Green ordered to dump \$468,000

In late July, the Democracy Campaign questioned whether federal political action committees (PACs) in Washington could legally contribute to a candidate for governor in Wisconsin. WDC found that a large number of national special interest PACs that had given Republican Congressman and GOP candidate for governor Mark Green close to a half million dollars could not make lawful donations to a candidate in a state race.

On those grounds, WDC challenged that portion of the nearly \$1.3 million Green's congressional campaign committee donated to his state campaign for governor. Acting on the Democracy Campaign's complaint, the state Elections Board ordered Green to get rid of nearly \$468,000 in illegal donations at its August 30 meeting.

A circuit court judge on September 25 rejected Green's appeal of the Elections Board decision. Before Judge Richard Niess ruled, state Justice Department attorneys argued that not only is the \$468,000 in federal PAC money donated to Green's campaign for governor illegal under state law but virtually all of the almost \$1.3 million federal-to-state committee transfer violates federal law.

The federal Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act allows federal campaign committees such as Green for Congress to donate to a state campaign so long as the donation complies with the state's campaign finance laws. State law limits such committee contributions to a candidate for governor in Wisconsin to \$43,128.

Judge Niess agreed with the Justice Department argument, ruling that the "federal law which authorized candidate Green to donate his federal campaign committee funds to his state campaign committee ('Green for Wisconsin') conditioned that donation upon compliance with Wisconsin campaign finance laws."

Two days after the circuit court ruling, the Democracy Campaign filed a formal complaint with the Federal Election Commission challenging the legality of \$1.24 million of the overall amount Congressman Green's federal campaign committee donated to the state account he is using to run for governor. The FEC officially accepted WDC's complaint, but is unlikely to act on it before the November 7 election.

Green has asked the state Supreme Court to overturn the Elections Board's order to dump the \$468,000 in illegal PAC funds. When this edition of the *Big Money Bulletin* went to print, the Supreme Court had not yet decided whether to take up the case.

Ethics survey open until Nov. 1

The Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, League of Women Voters of Wisconsin and Common Cause in Wisconsin decided in mid-August to reopen the ethics questionnaire the three groups sent to candidates for state office and accept responses through November 1.

Surveys were mailed in July to all Senate candidates in the 17 districts up for election in 2006 and also to candidates in all 99 state Assembly districts, as well as to all candidates for governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, secretary of state and state treasurer. Candidates were given two weeks to answer the questionnaire prior to public release of the responses.

A number of candidates contacted the reform groups after the deadline expressing interest in responding to the questions.

“It’s clear quite a few candidates who initially declined to answer our questions had second thoughts about their decision after being contacted by voters and news reporters,” Democracy Campaign director Mike McCabe said. “The public has put candidates’ feet to the fire and now a considerable number of additional candidates have chosen to take a public stand on ethics legislation. The more candidates we can pin down on these issues the better.”

While survey answers from candidates are being accepted through November 1, the responses of those who missed the original July 24 deadline are noted as late. The survey featured six yes-or-no questions covering campaign finance, ethics and other reforms. All the candidates’ responses are available on the Democracy Campaign’s web site at www.wisdc.org/lwvquestions.php.

Landmark survey shows distrust of government, faith in reform

Concern among Wisconsin residents about corruption in state government and the influence of money in state politics runs even higher than concern about bread-and-butter issues such as the economy and education, according to a new landmark public opinion survey conducted by Belden, Russonello & Stewart, an independent research firm in Washington, D.C.

The survey of public attitudes toward political and government reform conducted from June 14 through July 6 in five Midwestern states – Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota and Ohio – reveals deep distrust of state government, but also shows

Nearly three-quarters of Wisconsin residents believe that elected officials will not be able to keep their promises on important issues and over 60% feel that candidates who could represent them do not run for office because they do not have the money to win.

that Wisconsin citizens and other Midwesterners also believe reform is possible and are convinced that addressing the problem of money in politics will make government work better.

Nearly three-quarters of Wisconsin residents surveyed believe that elected officials will not be able to keep their promises on issues important to people like them unless the influence of money in government is limited. Over 60% of state residents feel that candidates who could represent them do not run for office because they do not have the money to win.

Yet 65% of Wisconsin residents disagree with the statement that “corruption in government will always be a problem, so trying to fix it will not make much difference.” And solid majorities believe that political reforms such as public financing of campaigns would make a big difference in making government work better.

More information about the five-state survey is available on the Democracy Campaign’s web site at www.wisdc.org/pr091406.php



Democracy not news on local TV

In the month following the traditional Labor Day kickoff of the 2006 election campaign season, television stations in nine Midwest markets devoted an average of 36 seconds to election coverage during the typical 30-minute local news broadcast, according to the Midwest News Index, a five-state monitoring project involving the University of Wisconsin-Madison's NewsLab, the Democracy Campaign and similar groups in Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota and Ohio.

By contrast, the typical early- and late-evening local news broadcasts contained more than 10 minutes of advertising, over seven minutes of sports and weather, and almost two-and-a-half minutes of crime stories.



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The study, which will continue through the summer of 2007, is looking at how local news broadcasts cover politics and government in nine markets in five Midwestern states, including Milwaukee and Madison.

The amount of election coverage on Milwaukee TV news exactly paralleled the dismal regional average, further illustrating why the Democracy Campaign assembled a coalition of groups and Milwaukee area residents late last year to formally challenge the renewal of all commercial television licenses in the state's largest TV market.

Stations in Madison did much better than their counterparts in the other eight TV markets monitored for the study, airing considerably more campaign-related stories and devoting almost twice as much time to election coverage.

Across the region, however, both the quantity and quality of coverage were bleak. What little time was spent on election coverage mostly focused on campaign strategy, poll results and other horserace aspects of elections.

More information about the study is available online at www.wisd.org/pr101206.php

Giving to Community Shares is another way to support WDC

The Democracy Campaign is a member of Community Shares of Wisconsin, which raises funds for 56 grassroots nonprofit organizations that build social and economic equity and a healthy environment. Celebrating its 35th Anniversary this year, Community Shares of Wisconsin supports its member agencies – including the Democracy Campaign – through workplace giving campaigns at over 100 private sector employers in the Greater Madison area.



State and federal government employees throughout Wisconsin as well as many local government employees in the Greater Madison area also contribute to Community Shares and its member agencies through their fall Combined Campaign.

If your employer is a Community Shares campaign site, please consider supporting the Democracy Campaign this fall through this workplace giving program. If your employer does not currently offer a workplace giving opportunity, contact WDC outreach director Debby Anderson Meyer at 608-255-4260 to discuss how to become a campaign site for Community Shares of Wisconsin.

Incumbents enjoy big cash edge

Heading into the stretch drive of the 2006 election campaign, state legislative candidates had a record \$5.1 million in their campaign accounts with incumbents holding a \$6-to-\$1 cash advantage over their challengers.

Campaign finance reports covering fundraising by legislative candidates in 99 Assembly and 17 Senate races between July 1 and August 28 show campaign war chests are up 29 percent from the \$3.96 million legislative candidates had at this time in 2004. The latest total also was 38 percent higher than the \$3.69 million legislative candidates had in 2002 and 96 percent higher than the \$2.6 million they had on hand at



Guns and campaign money

State Representative Frank Lasee recently made national news in the wake of the tragic shooting in a Cazenovia school when he suggested that teachers and other school officials be allowed to carry concealed weapons. *The Capital Times* compared Lasee's proposal to "fighting fires with gasoline."

The Green Bay-area Republican wants hidden guns in school but prefers that politicians keep their weapons in plain view. Lasee took sharp exception to the recent five-state survey showing broad citizen support for public financing of state election campaigns, calling the reform "undemocratic" and insisting that private campaign donations should continue to flow freely but should be fully disclosed.

"Full disclosure is the answer," Lasee said. ***"If a candidate wants to be the wholly owned subsidiary of WEAC or WMC at least the voters know."***

One big collective citizen

Late last year, the Democracy Campaign shined light on more than \$41,000 in campaign contributions to Governor Jim Doyle from utility executives around the time a state panel controlled by Doyle appointees first denied, then reopened and approved the controversial sale of the utilities' Kewaunee nuclear power plant to Virginia-based Dominion Resources.

Five weeks after applying to buy the plant, Dominion executives gave \$2,000 to Doyle's campaign – the first and only Dominion contributions to any Wisconsin candidate – and then got a meeting with Doyle's chief of staff 10 days later. The deal was given final approval just over four weeks after the meeting.

Asked whether his company was seeking to buy influence, Dominion spokesman Richard Zuercher told a reporter, ***"We are a corporate citizen. We participate as is our right in the political process."***



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