

## Inside

### Page 2

Ziegler fined for breaking ethics law  
Business outgives unions 12-1

### Page 3

Midwest groups call on FCC to act  
TV stations allergic to democracy

### Page 4

Not-so-blind justice  
Long distance kudos

Get Big Money



Out of Politics!

June 2007

Edition No. 55

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



## Senate passes 3 WDC-supported reforms

*Vote on judicial public financing bill expected soon*

The state Senate on May 9 passed three reform proposals supported by the Democracy Campaign including **Senate Bill 77**, truth-in-campaigning legislation requiring full disclosure of special interest electioneering. SB 77 was approved on a 26-7 vote.

The Senate also passed **Senate Bill 23**, a lobbying reform measure that addresses the revolving door between lawmaking and lobbying by requiring a one-year waiting period before state lawmakers who leave the Legislature may start working as lobbyists at the Capitol. SB 23 passed 30-3.

A third WDC-backed bill, **Senate Bill 170**, known as the Judicial Right to Know bill, was passed on a 19-14 vote. SB 170 aims to make sure that all parties involved in court cases are notified of judges' economic interests as well as rules regarding conflicts of interest and judicial recusal.

SB 170 was introduced about five weeks after the Democracy Campaign filed a complaint with the Wisconsin Judicial Commission that prompted an investigation into conflicts of interest state Supreme Court Justice-elect Annette Ziegler had while ruling on numerous cases as a circuit court judge. Ziegler already has agreed to penalties as part of a settlement with the state Ethics Board (see page 2), and the Judicial Commission's investigation is ongoing.

The Senate also plans to vote on SB 171, the Impartial Justice bill establishing public financing of state Supreme Court elections. SB 171 won the approval of the Senate Committee on Campaign Finance Reform, Rural Issues and Information Technology on May 8.



*Over 40 citizens picketed in front of the Supreme Court chambers in a May 7 demonstration for impartial justice organized by the Democracy Campaign*

---

## Ziegler admits guilt, pays fine

State Supreme Court Justice-elect Annette Ziegler admitted May 16 that she broke state ethics laws and agreed to pay a \$5,000 fine plus another \$12,000 to cover the costs of the state's investigation into her financial conflicts of interest.

Ziegler took the actions to settle a complaint filed against her by the state Ethics Board alleging she violated state ethics laws prohibiting public officials from acting on matters in which they have a financial interest.

In the settlement, Ziegler acknowledged she violated the ethics code by handling five cases in recent years involving West Bend Savings Bank, where her husband, J.J. Ziegler, is paid about \$20,000 a year as a member of the board of directors.

By settling the matter, Ziegler avoided a hearing that could have seen her called to the witness stand. However, she remains under investigation by the state Judicial Commission, which is acting on a complaint by the Democracy Campaign.

The Judicial Commission is examining a broader group of cases to determine whether Ziegler violated the Judicial Code of Conduct by handling matters as a Washington County circuit court judge in which she or her husband had a significant financial or business relationship with one of the parties involved in the cases.

WDC's complaint cited 16 cases, including nine involving businesses in which Ziegler owned \$50,000 or more worth of stock. Seven other cases involve West Bend Savings Bank, which not only pays Ziegler's husband for being a member of its board of directors but also is renting office space he owns. In addition, the Zieglers received a multi-million dollar loan from the bank.

If the Judicial Commission concludes there were violations after completing its investigation, it could file a formal complaint with the state Supreme Court. The court is empowered to take disciplinary action to enforce the Judicial Code of Conduct, ranging from reprimand or formal censure to suspension or even removal from the bench.

The Judicial Commission's investigation is not expected to be completed until after Ziegler is sworn in as a Supreme Court justice on August 1.

---

## Business outgives labor 12-1

Business interests have made \$12 in campaign contributions for every \$1 labor unions have given to candidates for statewide office and the legislature since 1995, a Democracy Campaign analysis released late last month shows.

Business interests made \$67.4 million in large individual and political action committee contributions compared to labor's \$5.8 million between 1995 and 2006 to candidates for governor,

---

***The old assumption that business and labor are political equals – and that business bankrolls Republicans while unions fund Democrats – is a myth. Business has a firm financial grip on both major parties. Even Democrats, traditionally the party of organized labor, get five times more campaign money from business interests than from labor unions.***

---

lieutenant governor, attorney general, the legislature and legislative leadership committees.

During the three races for governor in 1998, 2002 and 2006, campaign contributions by business special interests blew away labor contributions. The widest gap was \$30 to \$1 in the 2006 election cycle, followed by \$29 to \$1 in 1998 and \$10 to \$1 in the 2002 gubernatorial election cycle.

In the 2002 governor's race, Democratic Governor Jim Doyle's business-to-labor contribution ratio was about \$7 to \$1. In Doyle's 2006 reelection bid, the business-labor contribution ratio increased nearly four-fold to about \$24 to \$1.

Business interests have a firm financial grip on both major political parties. Even Democrats, traditionally the party of organized labor, get five times more campaign money from business than from unions – \$25.5 million from business interests compared to \$5.3 million from labor from 1995 through 2006.

The Democracy Campaign's analysis is available online at [www.wisdc.org/pr052907.php](http://www.wisdc.org/pr052907.php)

## Midwest groups call on FCC to hold broadcasters accountable

In a letter sent in recent days to the Federal Communications Commission and key congressional leaders, an alliance of Midwest civic and political reform groups including the Democracy Campaign called for a new approach to federal regulation of the broadcast industry that would create more precise and demanding public interest obligations for local television broadcasters as part of the new regulatory framework that will govern the pending transition from analog to digital broadcasting.

The letter – signed by a coalition of groups from Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin operating under the banner of the Midwest Democracy Network – cites recent findings from a series of University of Wisconsin studies showing that the viewing public is being shortchanged when it comes to coverage of critical state and local elections and government issues (see accompanying article on this page).

Among the reforms the Midwest Democracy Network is calling for is a requirement that licensed broadcasters air a minimum of three hours per week of public affairs programming on the most-watched channels they control or operate, all between 6 a.m. and 11:35 p.m. and at least half of it aired during prime viewing hours.

The groups also call for at least two of the three-hour minimum to be devoted to electoral affairs programming in the 30 days prior to a primary election and the 60 days prior to a general election for federal, state or local public office. Under the proposal, such programming would be aired between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m. and between 5 p.m. and 11:35 p.m. on the licensee's most-watched channel.

Under the groups' plan, broadcasters must periodically report in detail how they are serving the public interest and renewal of their licenses is contingent on stations documenting these efforts.



## Democracy off-limits on TV news

An ongoing University of Wisconsin study of local television news coverage of elections and government is showing that TV stations in five Midwest states are virtually allergic to democracy.

The monitoring project, conducted by UW-Madison's NewsLab in cooperation with a coalition of Midwest reform groups including the Democracy Campaign, is examining local TV news in Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin. Since September 2006, the project has systematically monitored and evaluated evening newscasts on 35 network affiliates in nine markets, including Chicago, Springfield, Detroit, Lansing, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Cleveland, Columbus, Milwaukee and Madison.

The resulting Midwest News Index documents the lack of substantive coverage of elections and government. In the most recent monitoring period covering the first quarter of 2007, stations dedicated just one minute and 35 seconds to government news during a typical 30-minute news broadcast – less than one-fifth the air time devoted to sports and weather. Even promos for upcoming stories or programs – known in the industry as “teasers” or “bumpers” – commanded more time than government coverage at nearly two minutes.

Earlier Midwest News Index findings showed that between the traditional Labor Day kickoff of the 2006 election season and October 6, television stations devoted an average of only 36 seconds to election coverage during the typical 30-minute local news broadcast. In the final month leading up to last November's elections, local television news viewers saw considerably more paid political advertisements than actual news coverage – nearly four and a-half minutes of paid political ads compared with an average of one minute and 43 seconds of election news coverage.

“The findings from the Midwest News Index reports reveal a retreat from responsibility by local television stations,” the Midwest Democracy Network said in a mid-June letter to federal regulators. “They also reveal an equally distressing failure by the Federal Communications Commission to regulate broadcasting in accordance with the ‘public interest, convenience, or necessity,’ a principle first enshrined in the Radio Act of 1927 and later in the Communications Act of 1934.”

## Sign of the times

“Lady justice peeking” – one of the homemade signs carried by picketers in front of the state Supreme Court chambers at a May 7 demonstration organized by the Democracy Campaign, just two days before the state Senate passed the Judicial Right to Know bill (see article on page one).



## From WDC's inbox

To: wisdc@wisdc.org

Subject: Good Work

I have been receiving your e-mails for some time now and thought I would write and tell you how informative your e-mails and web site have been. You show people, nationwide, how democracy should work.

Keep up the great work. You are an inspiration, at least to me.

Regards,

William H. Hill, President  
West Babylon Civic Association  
West Babylon (Long Island), New York



210 N. Bassett St. Suite 215  
Madison, WI 53703

608 255-4260  
[www.wisdc.org](http://www.wisdc.org)