



Big Money Bulletin

Inside

Page 2

How a bill *really* becomes law
Official gets snared in casino probe
Gains made on democracy reform

Page 3

Public wants better court elections
A symbol of the problem
Making lemonade out of lemons

Page 4

She said *what*?

Get Big Money



Out of Politics!

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Supreme Court election exposes broken system, but lawmakers drag feet on fix

In the wake of another ugly election for state Supreme Court, the Democracy Campaign was joined April 9 by Common Cause in Wisconsin and the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin in sending a letter to legislators calling on them to revive the dormant special session on campaign finance reform and act to fix the broken system.

In the letter, the groups wrote: *“The campaigning in this year’s Supreme Court race was not only demeaning and highly damaging to our state’s highest court, but it also was perhaps the starkest illustration yet of what has gone haywire in election campaigns in Wisconsin. Not only was the race outrageously expensive and the advertising misleading and often downright untruthful, but most of the campaigning was done outside of state laws designed to ensure an informed citizenry and protect the integrity of our elections. As a result, a few interest groups got to do almost all of the talking and the public was kept in the dark about who was paying for the lion’s share of the campaign advertising.”*

The letter went on to say, *“It is time to return our elections to the candidates and the voters. The legislature and governor can do this right now. We call on legislative leaders to reconvene the special session on campaign finance reform and act on Special Session Senate Bill 1.”*

The groups said the bill *“contains all of the ingredients needed to make sure we don’t again experience what all of Wisconsin had to endure”* in the recent high court election and added it *“overhauls the way Supreme Court elections are financed, repairs Wisconsin’s broken campaign finance system for other state races, and restores meaning to the disclosure requirements and campaign contribution limits in current state law.”*



Add your voice to ours.



Tell your state legislators to rescue the Supreme Court from special interest control.

Call the Toll-Free Legislative Hotline

1-800-362-9472

WDC spoofs 'Schoolhouse Rock'

In early March, the Democracy Campaign began airing a short animated feature on its Web site that parodies the classic 1975 Schoolhouse Rock educational video "I'm Just a Bill" about how laws are made.

In producing "Statehouse Crock!" the Democracy Campaign teamed up with two talented Wisconsin artists – political cartoonist



Mike Konopacki and singer-songwriter Peter Leidy. Konopacki produced the animation and Leidy wrote the lyrics and performed the song with Steve Kantowitz and Calli Steinhoff.

Konopacki's work frequently appears in *The Capital Times* while Leidy is a regular on Wisconsin Public Television's public affairs program "Here and Now."

The video can be viewed on the Democracy Campaign's Web site at www.wisdc.org/crock.php. It also is posted on YouTube and can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=VthQrouBNT.

This is not the first time the Democracy Campaign has collaborated with Konopacki and Leidy. Back in 2005, Konopacki produced a 30-second TV ad that the Democracy Campaign aired on stations in Milwaukee, Green Bay, Madison, Eau Claire, La Crosse and Wausau. Leidy, whose musical satire often takes aim at the State Capitol, performed at the Democracy Campaign's 10th anniversary celebration in 2005 and will be performing at WDC's upcoming annual meeting on May 6.

Casino probe nets 4th conviction

Federal prosecutors announced April 9 that former Kenosha County Executive Allan Kehl agreed to plead guilty to conspiracy to receive illegal payments. Kehl, who resigned in March, admitted to receiving \$15,000 in cash from Kenosha businessman and casino developer Dennis Troha. Prosecutors agreed to recommend a sentence of two years in prison. Kehl's plea agreement is the latest offshoot of the casino corruption scandal that earlier led to the criminal convictions of Troha and associates John Erickson and Achille Infusino.

Winning, slowly but surely

The 2007-08 session was an eventful one for democracy reform, beginning with the passage of landmark ethics reform legislation replacing ineffective enforcement agencies with a new politically independent office answering to a nonpartisan board and equipped with an unlimited budget for investigations. The new Government Accountability Board is now up and running.

Just before the holidays, the governor relented to pressure and called a special legislative session on campaign finance reform. This special session has not yet been adjourned, so the comprehensive reform plan that was introduced as Special Session Senate Bill 1 in January could still be acted upon before the end of this year.

Regardless of the special session's eventual fate, democracy reform issues got more traction in the 2007-08 session than ever before, with five reform bills passed in the Senate and five more approved by a Senate committee. And there were roll call votes on a number of bills in the Assembly, putting legislators on the record and holding them more accountable on these issues than they have been for many years.

Bills passed by the full Senate include SB 23 (one-year wait for state officials before lobbying), SB 77 (issue ad disclosure), SB 170 (disclosure of judicial conflicts of interest), SB 171 ("Impartial Justice" bill creating publicly financed Supreme Court elections) and SB 463 (special interest electioneering disclosure).

Bills passed by a Senate committee include SB 12 (Ellis-Erpenbach comprehensive campaign reform), SB 25 (ban on fundraising during the state budget process), SB 160 (disclosure of donations from out-of-state committees), SB 182 (Risser-Pocan Clean Elections bill) and Special Session SB 1 (comprehensive reform plan combining Ellis-Erpenbach and Impartial Justice bills).

Roll call votes were held on three bills in the Assembly – AB 61 (banning fundraising during the budget process), AB 250 (Impartial Justice) and AB 272 (issue ad disclosure) – putting members of the lower house on the record on these reform proposals.

Public unhappy with court races

The people of Wisconsin want elections for state Supreme Court. But state citizens want those elections cleaned up. That's according to the latest polling done by the St. Norbert College Survey Center.

Only 17% of respondents to the survey conducted between March 25 and April 5 said they believe Supreme Court elections should be abolished and justices should be appointed by the governor. And only 18% said the elections should be run the way they currently are. A clear majority want reform of high court elections.

There also is a strong disliking of special interest advertising in Supreme Court races, with 61% saying such ads distort the race, while only 27% say interest group ads give important information to voters.

From the Big Money Blog

It's a symbol alright

State lawmakers were four months late passing a state budget, and the budget they eventually passed is already badly out of balance. And now they can't agree on how to patch up the holes. They also couldn't bring themselves to do a thing about the broken health care system. And even after we all had to shower following the most recent Supreme Court election, campaign finance reform seems the furthest thing from their minds.

But, hey, they agreed on something – a new state symbol. On April 7, Governor Doyle signed into law legislation approved by both houses that designates an official state tartan.

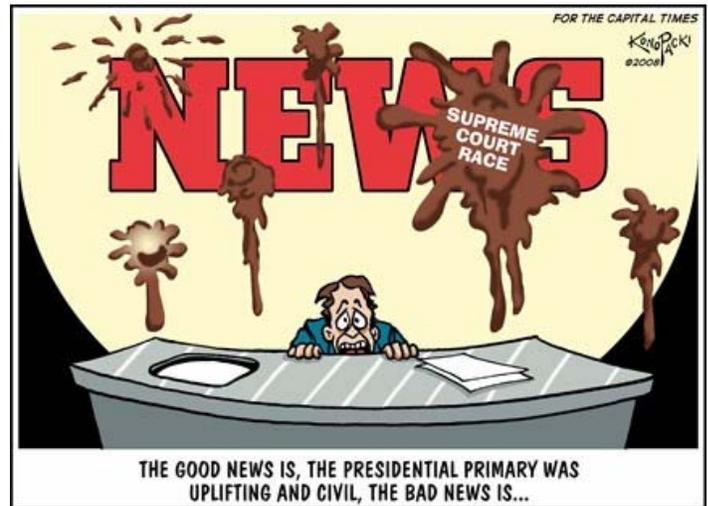
Meanwhile, there's a new toll-free hotline citizens can use to report waste, fraud and abuse in Wisconsin. The number to call is **877-372-8317**. Or you can report what's bugging you via the Internet (at www.legis.state.wi.us/lab/fraudhotline.htm).

Maybe the first phone or Web tip should be about the Legislature.

— posted by Mike McCabe on April 9, 2008

There's more where this came from on the Big Money Blog.

www.wisdc.org/blog/bigmoneyblog.html



Make those election lemons into lemonade

On the front page of this *Big Money Bulletin*, we urge you to contact your legislators to insist on reform of Supreme Court elections. There's something else you can do to take out your frustration on those who are engineering the hostile takeover of our state's highest court – support the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign.

Please consider an extra gift or increase your regular giving. Our judicial system is under assault and we need your help to keep fighting back against the special interests that are trying to claim ownership of our courts.

To make a tax-deductible donation, just use the reply card and return envelope in this edition of the *Big Money Bulletin*.

Comings and goings

Barb Kneer is the latest addition to the Democracy Campaign's staff, taking over as financial manager in February. She replaces Peggy Kleinhans, who served in the position for more than two years. Barb comes to the Democracy Campaign with over 10 years of nonprofit accounting and financial management experience and another 10 years in state service. Before joining the Democracy Campaign's staff, she was chief financial officer for Clean Wisconsin and previously was financial manager for Midwest Environmental Advocates. Welcome, Barb!

Oil sheiks for a better Wisconsin

In a recent program aired on the WisconsinEye public affairs TV network, moderator John Powell questioned Wisconsin Right to Life legislative director Susan Armacost about her views on disclosure of election campaign activity. Powell, the former State Capitol reporter for Wisconsin Public Radio, asked hypothetically:

“Some wealthy oil sheik could dump \$10 million on a race to influence a Wisconsin election and no one would know where the money came from. Now isn't that possible?”

Armacost's answer was a jaw-dropper.

“So what? If he has a . . . you know, so what? It's like this argument about if you don't live in the district of a legislator you shouldn't be giving them money. Why not?”

The last word

Habeas circus

It's said that truth is the first casualty of war, and that certainly was the case in this year's Supreme Court election. The campaigning was ceaselessly deceptive and misleading, often downright untruthful, and with very few exceptions unrelentingly trashy.

Not only were the messages pure sleaze, but even the subject of the advertising was misleading. A few special interest groups did 90% of the campaign advertising in the race. They decided which issue would be discussed and controlled what was said about that issue. The issue was crime, even though it has virtually nothing to do with the work of the Supreme Court and absolutely nothing to do with why these interest groups want control of the courts.

— Mike McCabe



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**Lawmakers snooze even after
April 1 wake-up call — page 1**

**Democracy Campaign remakes
a classic — page 2**

**A way to take out your
frustrations — page 3**

You're Invited....

WDC Annual Membership Meeting

Tuesday, May 6

4 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

UW-Madison Memorial Union

**Keynote address by author of
“What Sex is a Republican?”**