

Inside

Page 2

Taking it to the streets
Dark money rising

Page 3

U.S. judged a “failing” democracy
One way to change the world

Page 4

TV stations peddling junk food diet

Make People Matter



More Than Money!

October 2012

Edition No. 82

On the Web:

www.wisdc.org



‘End Legal Bribery’ campaign launched

At events in Milwaukee, Green Bay and Madison on September 10 and 11, clean government advocates and non-profit groups including the Democracy Campaign announced an initiative to end the legal bribery of Wisconsin politicians. Decades-old Wisconsin ethics laws designed to guard against political corruption have not been updated in decades and fail to account for the massive amounts of money changing hands in election campaigns.

“Wisconsin used to be a beacon of clean, open and honest government. A big reason for that is we used to have some of the nation’s best anti-corruption laws. Those laws are now obsolete. They are no longer worth the paper they are written on,” WDC director Mike McCabe said. “A new form of bribery has grown up around us, and it’s perfectly legal. Bribery should be a crime, not standard operating procedure.”



WDC director Mike McCabe speaking from the steps of the Milwaukee County Courthouse at the September 10 kickoff

The groups’ proposal closes major loopholes in Wisconsin’s ethics code, amending the conflict of interest law so officials would have to abstain from acting on matters of interest to those who provide substantial campaign support. It also challenges Wisconsin lawmakers to amend the state’s gift ban to address political contributions and other forms of election campaign support, which are currently excluded.

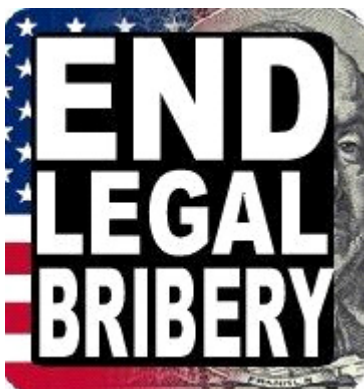
“The law says you can’t give public officials ‘anything of value’ if it might influence or reward them,” McCabe said. “You can’t buy legislators a beer or a cup of coffee. But you can give them huge campaign donations. In this day and age, it is hard to imagine anything of greater value to the average politician than a campaign contribution.”

The Democracy Campaign worked with Citizen Action of Wisconsin and Wisconsin Voices to develop the proposal. Groups signing on in support of the initiative include ABC for Health, Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups, United Council of UW Students, WISPIRG, 9to5 Milwaukee, Working America, Wisconsin Farmers Union, Midwest Environmental Advocates, Citizens Utility Board, Sierra Club, Madison-area Urban Ministry and South Central Wisconsin Move to Amend.

Campaign takes to the streets with petition drive, speaking tour

Labeling the torrent of money in election campaigns a new form of legal bribery, the Democracy Campaign joined with 14 other citizen groups to put forward a proposal to “call it what it is” and strengthen legal protections against corruption in state law.

After kicking off the campaign with media events in Milwaukee, Green Bay and Madison, WDC staffers fanned out across the state giving 16 presentations in nine different counties in the two weeks since the initiative was launched. At least a half dozen more talks on the subject will be given before October ends.



The Democracy Campaign also started a petition drive to demonstrate public support for the needed

changes to Wisconsin laws. A copy of the petition is included in this edition of the *Big Money Bulletin*. WDC members are encouraged to gather signatures and return completed petitions to the address on the bottom of the form. In addition, petitioning is being done online at www.wisdc.org/endbribery.php.

WDC’s “End Legal Bribery” initiative is aimed at raising awareness of how outdated longstanding anti-corruption laws in Wisconsin have become and prompting lawmakers to restore their relevance by amending the state ethics code to address the corrupting effects of election campaign money.

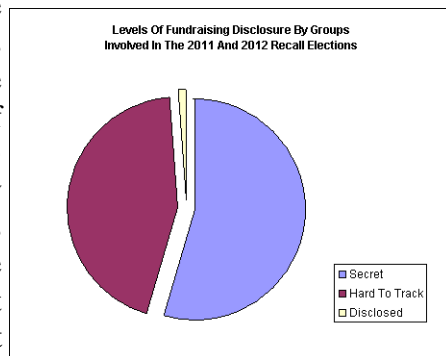
Bribing a public official was outlawed in Wisconsin 115 years ago, and that law is still on the books. But it is silent on the money in election campaigns. So are the 40-year-old gift ban and conflict of interest law. These laws no longer offer any real protection from political corruption because they do not deal with the way corruption works today.

At the time the laws were written, there was next to no television advertising in election campaigns, and the overall cost of seeking office was a small fraction of what it is now. Lawmakers then could not possibly have envisioned an election for governor like this year’s costing – by WDC’s tally – \$81 million.

Dark money rises in recall races

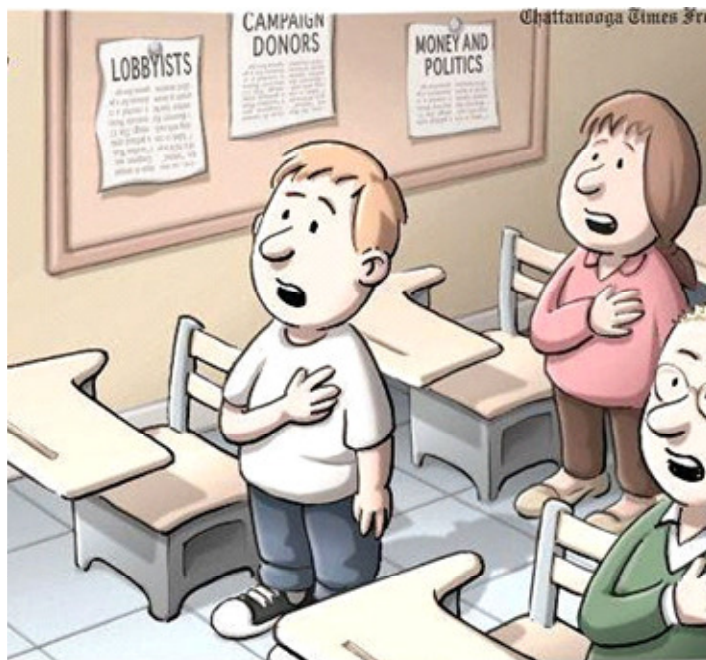
Over half of the money spent by special interest groups to influence the 2011 and 2012 recall elections came from secret sources, a Democracy Campaign analysis issued last month shows.

The study looked at 65 groups that spent an estimated \$75.8 million in the recall races for governor, lieutenant governor and 13 state Senate seats. Of the money the groups raised since the beginning of 2011, only 1% came from fully disclosed donors while 55% came from secret sources. About 44% was raised from donors that are difficult to track but eventually could be identified.



The tens of millions of dollars from undisclosed sources used for recall election advertising in 2011 and 2012 is a measure of how outdated and inadequate Wisconsin’s disclosure laws have become. As recently as 1995, all the money spent in state elections could be traced to identifiable donors.

In mid-August WDC issued another report showing that legislative office holders running for reelection this fall had a \$10 to \$1 advantage over their challengers at the end of June – the largest mid-year cash edge in 10 years.



‘...with liberty and justice for sale.’

Is America a 'failing' democracy?

An international commission headed by former United Nations secretary general Kofi Annan issued a report last month warning that the United States qualifies as a "failing" democracy because of out-of-control election financing and laws making it more difficult to vote.

Democracy Campaign director Mike McCabe got a personalized version of this report when he met with a delegation of officials from Afghanistan on September 12. The international exchange program sponsored by the U.S. State Department that arranged the visit now regularly schedules Mike to meet with foreign delegations touring Wisconsin.

"I gave them my take on the condition of democracy here. Several of them said they don't think America has much of a democracy based on what they were seeing," he said. "One asked me point blank how the U.S. can export democracy to other countries when its own system is in such poor shape."

He added: "They were blunt about corruption in their own country, openly acknowledging that there are few if any places in the world where it's worse. And they talked very candidly about the challenges and obstacles they face in trying to build civil society. They weren't lecturing me about how we should run our country. They were just making it clear that what they saw here didn't live up to their expectations or our nation's claims."



WDC director Mike McCabe meets with a delegation of officials from Afghanistan at the Capitol. The exchange was part of an international visitors program sponsored by the U.S. State Department.

Workplace giving: Changing the world one backyard at a time

The oldest social action fund in the country, Community Shares of Wisconsin connects people who want to give charitably with worthy nonprofit groups needing support, with the aim of promoting social and economic justice and a healthy environment.

Community Shares of Wisconsin raises funds for its member organizations – including the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, which became a member agency in 2004 – through workplace giving campaigns at participating private sector companies. Public employees also can give to Community Shares and its member groups through a combined campaign run by various state and local government agencies.



If you work for an employer that operates a workplace giving campaign including Community Shares, please help them help us by giving generously this fall. There are two ways you can support us through Community Shares. You can designate your gift to Wisconsin Democracy Campaign and we will get 100% of your contribution. Or, you can direct your gift to Community Shares and support all of the member nonprofits including the Democracy Campaign.

Please spread the word about this valuable way of supporting worthy causes including the work of the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, and encourage employers in your community to become part of the growing network of businesses and government agencies that give their employees the opportunity to change the world in their own backyards.

For more information. . . .

To learn more about Community Shares of Wisconsin's member agencies and workplace giving program, or to start a Community Shares campaign at your workplace, call **608-256-1066** or visit **www.communityshares.com**.

The revolution won't be televised

Talk about your junk food diets.

In the important presidential battleground of Colorado, TV viewers are seeing 162 minutes of political ads for every minute of news dealing with the truthfulness of the claims made in the advertising and what special interests are behind it and how they



are paying for the ads, according to the national media reform group Free Press.

A study by the group found that the hundreds of hours of local news that aired in the two weeks prior to Wisconsin's June 5 recall elections included no stories on the 17 groups most actively buying time on Milwaukee's ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC affiliates. While these stations were ignoring the impact of political ads, they found time to air 53

segments mentioning pop singer Justin Bieber.

The research also found the ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC affiliates in Charlotte, Cleveland, Las Vegas and Milwaukee did not once fact-check the claims made in political ads placed locally by the nation's top-spending Super PACs and independent groups, even though these groups spent tens of millions of dollars on frequently deceptive ads in those markets.

Cleveland's four network affiliate stations did no stories on the Koch brothers-funded group Americans for Prosperity, despite airing its attack ads more than 500 times. Americans for Prosperity paid more than \$1.5 million to place those ads.

Needless to say, TV stations addicted to the flow of cash from political advertisers are also ignoring proposals to change the campaign finance system, virtually never mentioning reform efforts in their news coverage.



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

608 255-4260
www.wisdc.org

FOLLOW US ON
twitter

facebook

Visit our facebook page.