

From the Director

November 5, 2009 is a date that will stick in my memory for a long time.

An amazing thing happened that day. Our state lawmakers took a stand for a nonpartisan, independent state Supreme Court. On that day both the state Senate and Assembly passed our Impartial Justice bill, easily the most significant campaign reform breakthrough in Wisconsin in more than 30 years. Not since 1977 has anything close to this magnitude been achieved in this state.

This historic victory was the culmination of a 10-year-long fight. The Impartial Justice bill had been introduced every session since 1999. On a couple of occasions, it was passed in one house of the Legislature but never both.

For years a quote from the great Indian independence leader Mahatma Gandhi has been plastered to the door to my office. His words stared at me for the duration of our battle for Impartial Justice.

**First they ignore you.
Then they laugh at you.
Then they fight you.
Then you win.**

For 10 years, our pleas for Supreme Court election reform were ignored, ridiculed and fought tooth and nail. On November 5th, we won.

Of the many factors that led to this victory, none was more important than stamina. All of us at the Democracy Campaign honor you for being the source of that stamina. We couldn't have continued to carry on the work that eventually led to the passage of the Impartial Justice bill without the ongoing financial support of loyal members who sustained us over this decade-long struggle. And our message to state policymakers surely would have fallen on deaf ears if it had not been repeatedly reinforced by the countless letters, e-mails, phone calls and personal visits to legislators from so many WDC supporters.

There were times along the way when I couldn't help but wonder if all our efforts might prove fruitless. Perhaps you felt that way sometimes too. But in the end, we won. Thanks to you.

This annual report is a brief summary of what we have been up to over the past year. I hope you will take a few minutes to look it over. And swell with pride over what has been accomplished with your help.



Mike McCabe



Historic victory for reform!

Legislation overhauling the financing of state Supreme Court elections passed both houses of the Legislature November 5 with bipartisan support. The vote to approve the Impartial Justice bill establishing publicly financed high court elections was 19-13 in the Senate and 51-42 in the Assembly.

Wisconsin became the first state to enact public financing legislation this year and only the third to ever adopt judicial public financing, joining North Carolina and New Mexico. The bill's passage also marked the first major campaign reform in Wisconsin since 1977.

The Democracy Campaign made enactment of the Impartial Justice bill a reform priority six and a half years ago and last year launched a Judicial Independence Project and an accompanying website – impartialjustice.org – to raise awareness of new threats in light of record-breaking special interest fundraising and campaign spending in the last three Supreme Court races and intensify the push for reform.

As part of that effort, 20 forums and town hall meetings on judicial independence were organized and held from November 2008 through June 2009, including three each in Milwaukee, Green Bay and Madison, two in La Crosse and one in Appleton, Eau Claire, Janesville, Oshkosh, Hayward, Lake Mills, Wisconsin Rapids, Mazomanie and Waunakee. A radio ad sponsored by WDC was aired for two weeks on 74 stations statewide, including at least one in every major market in the state, starting in late May. An Internet ad on the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* website also was started in late May and appeared for two weeks. A similar online ad was placed on the political news service WisPolitics.com for a month.

Hell freezes. Pigs fly. Campaign fundraising drops.

The state Assembly approved a rule in early February banning members of the lower house from soliciting or accepting campaign contributions during the state budget process. The Assembly rule – long sought by the Democracy Campaign and developed in consultation with WDC – prohibited fundraising by members from February 17 when the budget bill was introduced to June 29 when it was sent to the governor.

The rule worked. State legislative fundraising fell to its lowest level in 10 years, with lawmakers raising less than \$1 million in a six-month period from January to the end of June for the first time since 1999.

Even though the rule banning budget-season fundraising applied only to the Assembly, it led to reduced fundraising in the Senate as well. Contributions to senators were down 30% from the comparable period two years ago and were less than any time since the first half of 1999.

More change in the works . . .

With Supreme Court election reform passed, attention now turns to efforts to close a gaping loophole in Wisconsin law allowing special interest groups to secretly spend unlimited amounts of money to influence state elections. Legislation strongly supported by the Democracy Campaign requiring full disclosure of so-called “issue ads” and requiring sponsors of such campaigning to abide by limits on contributions the same as candidates already has cleared committees in both houses and now awaits debate and votes in the Senate and Assembly.

During the debate on the Impartial Justice bill, Senate

Student intern Dan Hodge



Mike McCabe at Fighting Bob Fest



League of Women Voters director Andrea Kaminski (l) with WDC board members Peter Cannon (c) and Pat Finder-Stone (r)



leader Russ Decker promised a vote on special interest electioneering reform in January or February.

The legislation was introduced in mid-February as Senate Bill 43 and Assembly Bill 63 by bipartisan sponsors. It received a public hearing by Assembly and Senate committees in May and got Assembly committee approval in June. The Senate committee approved it on September 15.

At the urging of the Democracy Campaign, regulations mirroring **SB 43** and **AB 63** were approved a year ago by the state Government Accountability Board and then were finalized and sent to the Legislature for approval by the agency in March. The GAB later withdrew the new rules and put them on hold temporarily pending the outcome of a U.S. Supreme Court case.

Despite the fact the Legislature was preoccupied for the first half of 2008 by a state budget crisis that reached alarming proportions when projections pegged the budget deficit at \$6.6 billion, there was movement on other political reform measures supported by the Democracy Campaign, including a bill (AB 245) creating a one-year waiting period before departing legislators can become lobbyists that received a public hearing in April and was approved by an Assembly committee at the end of June. Also getting an Assembly hearing in April and committee approval in June was a WDC-backed proposal (AB 62) eliminating a double standard in state law that has been called a “home-court advantage” for state lawmakers when it comes to where they are prosecuted if charged with a crime. The same committee held hearings in June on two other WDC-backed bills – one banning convicted felons from lobbying in Wisconsin (AB 304) and the other making records showing the financial holdings of state lawmakers and other public officials more accessible to the public (AB 322) – and approved both bills on September 9.

Reform’s secret weapon.

The Democracy Campaign’s formula for success is simple. First, keep public officials honest by shining light in dark places at the Capitol and telling the media and the public what we see. And second, speak out forcefully for reforms that make people matter more than money. Here’s a small sampling of how we did that in the past year:

Following the Money— The Democracy Campaign continued to track the money in state politics, expanding Wisconsin’s only searchable computer database of contributors to state campaigns. That database now contains more than 540,000 records of campaign donations and is one of the most frequently visited features of WDC’s website, which tallied more than 3 million hits in the past year. WDC played a key role in monitoring fundraising and spending in 2008 state elections, including record-breaking spending of \$20.2 million on state legislative races.

Getting the Word Out— In the last year, the Democracy Campaign’s work generated more than 230 newspaper and magazine stories and over 140 radio and television stories or program appearances. Democracy Campaign staff members made more than 60 presentations to a collective audience of over 4,500 people at forums, workshops and group meetings in communities in every part of the state.

In the last year the Democracy Campaign started using Internet-based social networking tools to reach more people – and especially Web-savvy youth – with news updates and action alerts. More than 1,600 are following WDC on two **Facebook** sites, and almost 500 more have joined another focusing on WDC’s Judicial Independence Project. Four members of the staff also are maintaining personal Facebook pages. The Democracy Campaign also started posting audio **podcasts** on its website in March.

WDC board member Bill Benedict tabling at Fighting Bob Fest



Mike McCabe testifying at legislative hearing



WDC annual meeting



Twitter is the latest addition to the networking tools WDC is using. Since starting to send messages via Twitter in early July, close to 80 “tweets”—140-character messages that about 180 followers receive either in the form of text messages on their cell phones or via the Internet—have been posted.

New coalition partners— We added two new coalition partners to the growing number of voices calling for reform in Wisconsin. Welcome to ABC for Health, a public interest law firm connecting Wisconsin families to health care, and Madison-area Urban Ministry, a nonprofit interfaith social justice organization.

Building bridges.

In 2006 the Democracy Campaign reached across Wisconsin’s borders to become a founding member of the Midwest Democracy Network. WDC continues to be represented on the regional alliance’s five-member steering committee. Building on that initiative, WDC took the lead in organizing a Wisconsin Democracy Reform Roundtable modeled after MDN to facilitate better communication and collaboration within the state’s reform community.

Along with reform partners like the League of Women Voters and Common Cause, groups recruited to take part in roundtable activities include the Urban League, Voces de la Frontera, ACLU, League of Conservation Voters, Disability Rights Wisconsin, AFT-Wisconsin, Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups, Wisconsin Alliance for Retired Americans, River Alliance, Wisconsin Counties Association, League of Municipalities, Wisconsin Towns Association, the Alliance of Cities, Smokefree Wisconsin, Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, the state associations of

social workers and nurses, Wisconsin Federation of Cooperatives, Wisconsin Public Interest Research Group, United Council of UW Students and 1000 Friends of Wisconsin.

The roundtable is producing more regular contact between reform partners while also engaging some groups that were not previously involved at all in political reform efforts, and participating groups have come together to issue joint statements in support of reform initiatives like the Impartial Justice bill and special interest electioneering reform.

“Keep Democracy Alive” Legacy Fund

In spring of 2009 the WDC board approved the new “Keep Democracy Alive” Legacy Fund. The need for a healthy democracy and an independent voice doing research and advocacy will only increase. To assure a healthy mix of funding in addition to grants and annual membership donations, the Democracy Campaign is planning for the future with the creation of the Keep Democracy Alive fund. This fund will grow to a level that will allow a yearly amount to fund ongoing support needs or special projects.

This long term growth fund expands the opportunities for our faithful members to support our work for generations to come. If you would like more information about leaving a gift from your will, life insurance, bequest or stock, please contact us at 608-255-4260 or info@wisdc.org.

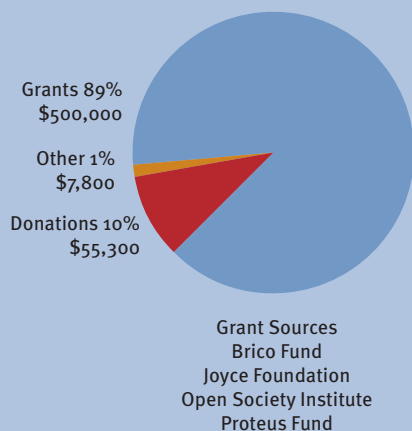
WDC outreach director Debby Meyer with AAUW's Anne Lee



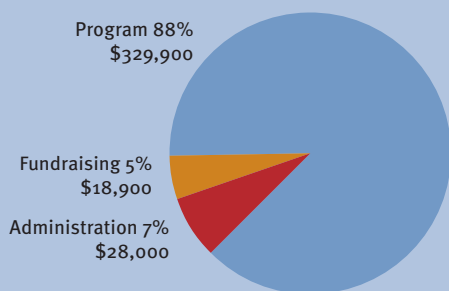
Justice Ann Walsh Bradley addresses annual meeting



Income \$563,100*



Expense \$376,800



* Includes grant income received for use in 2009-2010

WDC Board of Directors

- Bill Benedict
National Association of Social Workers-Wisconsin
- Alicia Boehme
Disability Rights Wisconsin
- Peter Cannon, *Secretary*
- Mark Evenson
AFT Wisconsin
- Pat Finder-Stone
Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups
- Sheila Guilfoyle
Progressive Dane
- Susan Lloyd
League of Women Voters of Wisconsin
- Sterling Lynk, *President*
- Joe McClain
- Leigh Roberts
Wisconsin Retired Educators' Association
- Judith Siers-Poisson
- Bruce Speight, *Vice President*
Wisconsin Public Interest Research Group
- Joe Syverson, *Treasurer*
Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters

WDC Staff

- Debby Anderson Meyer
Outreach Director
- Mike Buelow
Research Director
- David S. Julseth
Data Analyst
- Barb Kneer
Financial Manager
- Mike McCabe
Executive Director
- Beverly Speer
Advocacy Director

WDC Coalition Organizations

- AARP
- ABC for Health
- AFT-Wisconsin
- Alliance for Animals
- American Association of University Women - WI
- Associated Students of Madison
- Burlington Area Progressives
- Church Women United in Wisconsin
- Church Women United of Madison
- Citizens for a Scenic Wisconsin
- Citizens' Utility Board
- Clean Water Action Council
- Clean Wisconsin
- Coalition for Wisconsin Health
- Coalition of Independent Living Centers
- Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups
- Common Cause in Wisconsin
- Disability Rights Wisconsin
- Door County Environmental Council
- John Muir Chapter of the Sierra Club
- League of Women Voters of Wisconsin
- Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin
- Madison Teachers Inc.
- Madison Area Urban Ministry
- Midwest Environmental Advocates
- NASW Wisconsin
- National Farmers' Organization - Wisconsin
- Peace Action Wisconsin
- Progressive Dane
- River Alliance of Wisconsin
- Social Concerns Commission - WI Conference - United Church of Christ
- 1,000 Friends of Wisconsin
- United Council of UW Students
- Waukesha Area Citizens for Campaign Finance Reform
- Wisconsin Audubon Council
- Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WISCAP)
- Wisconsin Council on Children and Families
- Wisconsin Federation of Cooperatives
- Wisconsin Homecare Organization
- Wisconsin Interfaith Climate and Energy Campaign
- Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters
- Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice
- Wisconsin Public Interest Research Group
- Wisconsin Retired Educators' Association

Helping change our corner of the world . . .

The oldest social action fund in the country, Community Shares of Wisconsin, connects donors with nearly 60 local nonprofit groups building social and economic justice and a healthy environment.

. . . from your own backyard

Community Shares raises funds for its member agencies – including the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign – through workplace giving and other community-based fundraising. WDC became a member agency of Community Shares of Wisconsin in 2004 and this quickly became an important source of income for the Democracy Campaign. Thanks to all who donate to us in this way!



2008-2009 Annual Report

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