

July 10, 2012

Dear Legislative Leaders,

We are writing to urge you to hold hearings this summer to give the public opportunities to provide you feedback on the recall elections we've had in Wisconsin and the need for improved transparency and accountability in all our elections, to set the stage for a special legislative session on reform later this year.

While candidates, interest groups, and campaigns have spent more than \$100 million in recall elections over the past year, the public has largely been left in the dark about who is behind these unprecedented campaign contributions and expenditures, and therefore, what they are doing to our democracy.

Recent elections have exposed several troubling deficiencies in our campaign finance system which, over the past two years, have hidden essential information from the electorate and allowed outside interests to drown out the voices of ordinary Wisconsinites. We hope that you will take the lessons of 2011 and 2012 to heart and commit yourselves to reforming our elections system in the wake of the recalls.

We recommend that hearings focus on at least five specific actions that could be taken to bring us closer to transparency and accountability in Wisconsin elections:

- 1. New disclosure laws ensuring that the public can see where every single penny spent on state elections comes from.**
- 2. Close the loophole in Wisconsin law allowing public officials targeted for recall to engage in unlimited campaign fundraising.**
- 3. Require corporations to notify and get permission from shareholders in order to use their money for election spending.**
- 4. Require that television, radio, and newspaper outlets keep an online public record of advertising time purchased for electioneering purposes.**
- 5. Create an independent, nonpartisan redistricting authority to draw new legislative and congressional boundaries after each census.**

In the otherwise controversial arena of campaign finance, there has long been consensus – across the political spectrum – regarding the benefits of full disclosure of the sources and amounts of campaign funds. In fact, in the Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United* Justice Kennedy affirmed the importance of disclosure, writing that it “enables the electorate to make informed decisions and give proper weight to different speakers and messages.” Ironically, it was that very case which opened new pipelines for dark money to flow into our elections and led to significant new secret campaign spending.

Because of *Citizens United* we cannot at this time prevent unlimited spending in our state elections, but we can enact new disclosure laws shining light on that spending. We also can shore up existing limits on campaign contributions directly to candidates by closing obscure loopholes allowing those limits to be circumvented. And we can give individual citizens a say over how their money is used for political campaigning.

We urge your support and commitment to hold public hearings focusing on reforming how Wisconsin deals with campaign money and other aspects of our election process, which are sorely in need of greater accountability and transparency. Your support and immediate action to move forward with these modest but important reforms by holding hearings followed by a special legislative session will move Wisconsin toward full disclosure and election integrity.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. Members of our coalition will be following up with you or a member of your staff over the next several days.

Sincerely,

Bruce Speight, Director
WISPIRG

Nino Amato, President
Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Group

Andrea Kaminski, Executive Director
League of Women Voters of Wisconsin
Education Network

Billy Feitlinger, Director
WI Alliance for Retired Americans

Brynne McBride, Associate Director
ABC for Health Inc.

Kara Slaughter, Government Relations
Director
Wisconsin Farmers Union

Lisa Graves, Director
Center for Media and Democracy

Bryan Kennedy, Ph.D., President
AFT – WI

Diane Farsetta, Director
Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice

Matt Guidry, Communications Director
United Council of UW Students

Jeff Knight, Executive Assistant for Labor
Relations
Madison Teachers Inc.

Robert Kraig, Executive Director
Citizen Action of Wisconsin

Mike McCabe, Executive Director
Wisconsin Democracy Campaign

Kim Wright, Executive Director
Midwest Environmental Advocates

Senay Goitom, Co-Chair
South Central Wisconsin Move to Amend

Charlie Higley, Executive Director
Citizens Utility Board

Ken Taylor, Executive Director
Wisconsin Council on Children and Families

Linda Ketcham, Executive Director
Madison-area Urban Ministry

Anne Lee, President
American Association of University Women
- Wisconsin

Shahla Werner, Chapter Director
Sierra Club – John Muir Chapter