



Chris Danou's Capitol Report

Assembly Bill 387 Injects More Money into Political Campaigns

Last week, the Wisconsin State Assembly was in session to take up several bills that are on the legislative fast track. This is a tactic used by the majority party when something is a priority but is also considered to be controversial. The overall goal of fast tracking is to get the bill through as quickly as possible so there is less time to digest the bill in its entirety, let the public weigh in and let other lawmakers try to improve the bill.

One of the bills that was on the fast track last week was Assembly Bill 387, (AB 387) which relates to making changes to campaign finance laws. The bill only had two co-authors and happened to be the leaders in both houses of the legislature in Assembly Speaker Robin Vos (R-Rochester) and Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald (R-Juneau). It's pretty rare for a bill to come forward with only one author from each house so this is yet another indication of the bill being on the fast track.

While there are several troubling aspects to the bill, the two most alarming are that the bill allows individuals to spend unlimited amounts of money campaigning without disclosing who they are, and for the first time in modern Wisconsin history, corporations will be able to give unlimited money directly to political parties and legislative committees. This means there will be much more money in political campaigns. More money in political campaigns and political candidates means more ads on the radio and television, more telephone calls and negative postcards in your mailbox. Under these new terms as written in AB 387, a corporation from another country would be allowed to send a mail piece or produce a radio ad in a Trempealeau County or Village Board election.

Some other troubling items in AB 387 are that the bill doubles the contribution limits under current law applicable to candidates for state or local office, and beginning in 2021, every five years, contribution limits will be adjusted to reflect the percentage change in the consumer price index during the preceding five-year period. It's shocking to me that this is a major priority for the majority party. Not once since my election to the Assembly in 2008 have I had someone say to me, 'Hey Chris, we really need more money in political campaigns,' or 'I think people should be able to contribute more money to political candidates.' AB 387 does nothing but help elected officials and candidates stockpile more money for their own campaign purposes.

While this might be priority for the Speaker, Majority Leader and other legislative Republicans, this is definitely not a priority of mine, my Democratic colleagues or the people in our community and across the State. We know we have so many issues to address in our State when it comes to funding our public schools, fixing our roads, creating jobs and providing access to health care. For the Republicans to make this a priority – so they can accept more money for their own political campaigns – is shameful and selfish. Wisconsin deserves better than this from our legislative leaders.

