



HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

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Senator Marklein Statement on Campaign Finance Reforms

MADISON— State Senator Howard Marklein (R-Spring Green) released the following statement today regarding legislation passed by the Senate to reform Campaign Finance laws in Wisconsin:

“In 2014, the United States Court of Appeals told us that ‘Wisconsin’s foundational campaign finance law is in serious need of legislative attention.’ This was written in the decision for the Wisconsin Right to Life (WRTL) v. Barland II case.

“The court also said that our laws are ‘labryinthian and difficult to decipher’, ‘a dizzying array of statues and rules’, ‘obviously unconstitutional’ and more.

“The reforms we passed today update our state statutes to align with court decisions that protect our first amendment rights of free speech. We also modernized contribution limits, continued transparency through reporting, cleared up statutory language and standardized rules across the board. In total, there were more than 70 technical changes in the language of this bill.

“Overall, we made Chapter 11 easier to understand and apply to real-life circumstances so that everyone can comprehend campaign finance laws in our state, with or without a law degree.

“Everyone in Wisconsin should be able to express their ideas and support the people and issues that are important to them. This bill protects the free speech of individuals while creating clearer rules for those who work as a group to support a candidate or idea.

“In order to do this, we also needed to update the laws related to reporting so that we all know where money is flowing and for what purpose. This bill continues to require regular finance reports, standardizes timelines and requires disclosures for Independent Expenditure Committees, which are the groups that advocate for or against someone or something without coordinating with a candidate. The public has a right to know who is behind this money.

“While we increased contribution limits for individuals who give directly to candidates, we also prohibited contributions from corporations, labor organizations and American Indian tribes to regulated committees and individual candidates. These groups cannot pass contributions through a party directly to a candidate either.

“It is important to note that contribution limits have not been increased since 1973. A lot has changed in the past 43 years and our laws must reflect this. Adjusted for inflation, our limits would be five times what they are currently, but our change doubled them.

“For example, contributions to a candidate for state senate have been increased to \$2000 per person, for state assembly to \$1000 per person and for local offices to approximately \$500 per person. I believe these limits are modest and appropriate.

“The courts also told us that we have to allow unlimited contributions to several entities such as political action committees, political parties, recall committees, and referendum committees. However, giving to each of these entities also requires strict reporting.

“Funneling campaign contributions toward these entities increases a donor’s freedom to give, but also steers them to donate in ways that are reported and visible. More money will be given in ways that must be reported rather than to entities that do not have to share information. This reform is good for everyone and was instructed by the courts.

“Overall, campaign finance reform was needed to insure that Wisconsin law is constitutional and easier to apply and understand. I believe the changes we made today will bring our laws in line with the constitution, increase transparency and encourage political discourse by protecting the voice of all Wisconsinites in the political process.”

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