



STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
**GARY HEBL**  
46TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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**To Restore Trust in Wisconsin Judicial System, Reform is Necessary**  
*By Representative Gary Hebl*

Public trust in the judiciary has been on the decline in light of controversial Supreme Court cases that have called the ethical standards of sitting justices into question, as well as the increased partisanship of recent Wisconsin Supreme Court elections. This must change.

The 2010 United States Supreme Court decision *Citizens United v. FEC* opened the floodgates to unrestricted independent spending in political campaigns, including judicial elections. This landmark decision constituted a major rollback of over a century of progressive, good government initiatives designed to hold elected officials to a higher standard of impartiality. *Citizens United* has unfortunately led to the erosion of public faith in the courts, with many feeling that elections involving judges have been paid for by an influx of spending from special interest groups. This may call into question the impartiality of judges, especially if they sit on cases that involve campaign donors.

I have a plan to restore public trust in our courts. It starts with ensuring that the citizens of our state believe that, if they go before the court, they will receive fair judgment from an impartial judge. In the past, I have introduced a "Fair Courts" package to help ensure that our courts, judges, and justices are fair and unbiased. This package addresses several concerns that Wisconsin citizens have expressed.

The bill package would require a judge to take him- or herself off of a case that involves a party that has donated money to the judge's campaign. Sitting on judgment in such a case is an obvious conflict of interest, and is something that needs to be addressed to prove to Wisconsinites that we value a fair process. The package also allows for the full Supreme Court to review the decision of justices that decide against removing themselves from a case. Additionally, if a party to the action requests that a judge recuse themselves and the judge declines, the judge must submit in writing the reasoning behind their decision. This will require judges to more effectively and openly address whether they are capable of being impartial.

These are just some of the common sense reforms that would strengthen our judiciary and the public's perception of it, but so far the Republican majority has been unwilling to consider them. The public understands that court decisions should be based on law, not the outsized influence of a few special interest groups. Our goal as legislators is to consider and pass laws that will positively affect our citizens. My bill package is a practical way to begin to restore faith in our justice system. I hope that my

colleagues in the legislature will understand this, and we can work together to strengthen Wisconsin's judiciary.

*Rep. Gary Hebl represents the 46th Assembly District, which includes the cities of Sun Prairie and Stoughton, the village of Cottage Grove, and the townships of Cottage Grove, Dunkirk, Pleasant Springs, and Sun Prairie.*

*Contact Rep. Hebl with any questions or concerns you may have at (608) 266-7678 or via email at [Rep.Hebl@legis.wi.gov](mailto:Rep.Hebl@legis.wi.gov).*

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