

Republicans' Wisconsin: Open for Corruption

Throughout 2015, Republicans have forced radical policy proposals through the legislature at breakneck speed in order to ensure their complete control of state government. This week is no different.

The Republican-controlled State Assembly fast-tracked three bills that increase opportunities for political corruption, make it harder to investigate instances of political corruption, and make it almost impossible to prosecute political corruption. Two of the bills were introduced late last week, rushed through committee, and rushed through the Assembly this week:

- Assembly Bill 68, the Corrupt Politicians Protection Act, allows politicians to avoid accountability for their actions by exempting political crimes from investigation under Wisconsin's John Doe anti-corruption law.
- Assembly Bill 387 re-writes Wisconsin's campaign finance laws to give corporations even greater influence over our elections and decisions made in our state and local governments. The bill would also allow individuals to spend unlimited amounts of money campaigning in state or local elections without having to tell anyone who they are.
- Assembly Bill 388 will dismantle the Government Accountability Board, Wisconsin's nonpartisan watchdog agency run by six former judges and responsible for overseeing elections and ethics. Its replacement will be two politically-appointed commissions.

While all three proposals combine to create a new culture of political corruption, the rewrite of our campaign finance laws is most alarming. This bill will create huge loopholes and opportunities for unlimited spending that apply as equally to our non-partisan local elections as to our state races.

In either state or local races, this bill allows:

- Any individual or corporation to spend unlimited money, in coordination with a political candidate with no public disclosure, as long as they avoid "magic words" such as "vote for," "vote against," "elect," or "defeat;"
- Any individual or corporation to spend unlimited money independently of a political candidate more than 60 days before an election, likely with no public disclosure, expressly advocating to elect or defeat a candidate;
- Individuals or corporations to give unlimited money to political parties and legislative campaign committees, further empowering partisan legislative leaders.

Just as alarming is the speed with which Republicans are rushing these bills through. These bills make major changes to our laws, but legislators, members of the media and the public have not had a chance to fully comprehend and debate the changes. We saw similar tactics when Republicans attempted to throw out the public's right to access public records this summer.

We, as legislators, should be addressing our state's urgent problems: crumbling roads, how to bring back our suffering middle class, and lifting up struggling schools. These bills are a distraction from the need to improve economic security for hardworking people, and an attack on Wisconsin's tradition of clean, transparent government.

If you are concerned about these proposals and the future of our democracy, you must take action now. Talk to your neighbors and friends and contact your lawmakers today. Find out more at the legislature's homepage: <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/> or call the legislative hotline at: 1-800-362-9472.

State Representative Mark Spreitzer
45th Assembly District