



Historic IL campaign limits become law! / State reform news / Grassroots campaigns vital to census

Tue, Dec 22, 2009 at 5:19 PM



Welcome to the Midwest Democracy Network's twice-monthly e-newsletter -- the last newsletter of 2009! Thank you for keeping up with political reform news with us this year and rest up during the holidays because 2010 promises to be busy, as well!

A happy and safe holiday and new year to you from the Midwest Democracy Network! On to the news...

Gov. Pat Quinn signs Illinois campaign finance bill into law

Illinois Governor Pat Quinn made history today by signing the state's first legislation limiting campaign contributions into law.

Many of the speakers at the bill signing represented organizations that were part of the CHANGE Illinois! coalition. CHANGE Illinois! Is a coalition of organizations advocating campaign contribution limits, which has been encouraging the public to demand reform from their legislators throughout 2009.

"Imposing contribution limits will not cure all the ills in Illinois, no single law can ensure honesty and fairness," said Cindi Canary, director of [The Illinois Campaign for Political Reform](#), a partner of Justice at Stake, according to [Gavel Grab](#). "However, enactment of this limits bill...is a reason for real optimism about the prospects for good government in Illinois."

CHANGE Illinois! Co-chair Deborah Harrington, president of the Woods Fund of Chicago, said the campaign finance reform bill signed into law represented a "tremendous opportunity to increase democracy in our communities" and open up the process to new citizens interested in running for elected office.

Read the full MDN post [here](#).

Articles and Editorials

[Illinois campaign reform: Gov. Pat Quinn signs donation limits](#) - *Chicago Tribune*

[Illinois limits donations in elections](#) - *The New York Times*

[Pat Quinn signs campaign contribution bill on anniversary of Rod Blagojevich's arrest](#) - *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

[Campaign law falls short of what state needs](#) - *Bloomington Pantagraph*

Supreme Court Justices are hostile towards anti-corruption law

Supreme Court Justices are skeptical a commonly used ethics law is too vague to convict someone of fraud.

Enacted in 1988, the law states it is a crime "to deprive another of the intangible right of honest services." Several politicians and corporate executives have been prosecuted of fraud over the years based on the law, including former



Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich.

Prosecutors said to avoid a trial delay, they will simply charge Blagojevich with something new, according to a [Chicago Sun-Times article](#).

Under the law, Justice Antonin Scalia claimed every "bad act" is a crime and gives prosecutors and judges the ability to decide what is a crime without giving warning to citizens.

"A citizen is supposed to be able to understand the criminal law," Breyer said, yet it is unclear what this law brands a crime, said a [Chicago Tribune article](#).

For more information, read the full [MDN post](#).

More articles

[The final days of honest-services-fraud](#) - The Huffington Post

[Justices appear skeptical of anti-corruption Law](#) - *The New York Times*

[Supremes could weaken key anti-corruption law that helped convict Abramoff, Jefferson, others](#) - TPM Muckraker

STATE REFORM NEWS

ILLINOIS | Redistricting

Coalition proposes redistricting reform amendment

The League of Women Voters, the Better Government Association, the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform and former members of the Illinois Reform Commission recently introduced the "Illinois Fair Map Amendment."

The "Illinois Fair Map Amendment" would establish a nine-member board, with two members chosen by each legislative leader. The ninth member, and leader, would be chosen by the other eight board members.

To get this citizens' initiative on the ballot, the groups need to collect 500,000 signatures in Illinois by April 1, 2010.

"This puts the interest of people of Illinois ahead of the people with self interests," said Brad McMillan, executive director of the Institute for Principled Leadership in Public Service at Bradley University.

Read the full *Chicago Tribune* story [here](#) and the MDN post [here](#). Visit the [Fair Map website](#).

MICHIGAN | Fair & Impartial Courts

Michigan Supreme Court adopts new recusal rule

The Michigan Campaign Finance Network's Rich Robinson offers an analysis of the [Michigan Supreme Court ruling](#) that specifies grounds and procedures for disqualifying a justice based on impartiality.

"The Michigan Supreme Court's new disqualification rule sets a standard for judicial disqualification that is higher than deprivation of a litigant's due process rights. It says that disqualification is warranted if there is an objective and reasonable perception of a high probability of bias," said Robinson.

Read the full analysis [here](#).

Editorials

[Does new rule on disqualifying judges mean that rulings will be fairer?](#) - *The Detroit Free Press*

[NO: Justices should recognize limits on authority](#) - *The Detroit Free Press*

[Assuring judicial impartiality](#) - *The Detroit Free Press*

MINNESOTA | Ethics in Government

Legislators should have to wait before becoming lobbyists

According to [Common Cause Minnesota](#), Senator Dick Day's sudden resignation Tuesday, Dec. 8 from the Minnesota Senate highlights the need for Minnesota to enact a two year waiting period before a former legislator can become a

lobbyist.

“When a legislator leaves office to become a lobbyist it only further erodes the public’s trust in their elected officials,” said Mike Dean, executive director of Common Cause Minnesota. “The public is growing suspicious of elected officials who may use his or her government position to line up a future job by currying favor with special interests. The mere perception of impropriety underlying this type of behavior is detrimental to the public’s faith in government.”

The public is encouraged to contact their elected officials on this issue at www.commoncause.org/mn.

For more information, read the full MDN post [here](#).

OHIO | Election Law & Voting Rights

Ohio reaches settlement over Harkless lawsuit

The Ohio state government agreed to settle a lawsuit over voter-registration procedures for low-income residents.

Under the agreement, computers used by case workers will have information on voter registration. Employees will also be trained to help low-income residents register to vote. According to the [Associated Press](#), the secretary of state’s office agreed to perform unannounced spot checks of the procedures at local welfare offices and collect voter registration data at the offices.

Read the Lawyer’s Committee for Civil Rights Under Law’s press release [here](#).

Read the full settlement [here](#). More information can be found at the [MDN website](#).

Senate passes election changes

The number of places Ohio residents can cast absentee ballots has been increased as Senate Republicans approved several election changes last week.

The bill passed 22-10, with only one Democrat voting for the proposed changes.

House Democrats passed their own election changes three weeks prior to the Senate’s decision. Zero Republicans voted for the House’s bill.

Both bills would do away with "golden week," or the week where residents are allowed to register and vote on the same day, and increase the number of sites. The Senate bill would increase the number of sites from one to three, while the House bill would increase the number to four.

For more information, read *The Columbus Dispatch* story [here](#).

Opinions

[Joe Hallett commentary: Campaign-finance reports leave some questions unanswered](#) - *The Columbus Dispatch*

WISCONSIN | Ethics in Government

Two lawsuits filed aiming to kill public financing of state Supreme Court elections

From [Common Cause in Wisconsin](#): Late last Friday afternoon, Wisconsin Right to Life (WRTL) -- an organization that has long hated any and all campaign finance reform -- filed a lawsuit in Federal Court to block and strike down part of the Impartial Justice Act -- the new law that provides full public financing to qualifying candidates for the Wisconsin Supreme Court, that was signed by Governor Jim Doyle on December 1st. The suit alleges that the matching funds provision of the law - under which candidates who abide by spending limits would be eligible to receive a capped amount of matching funds if outside groups (like WRTL) spend against them or for their opponent -- "chills" the speech of outside groups (like WRTL).

We emphatically disagree with WRTL. The matching funds provision does nothing to prevent WRTL and other outside groups from spending and running their communications. It simply provides the target of their attacks with limited means to defend themselves so that the election is not completely dominated by the outside special interest groups (like WRTL). A similar provision was upheld by the courts in North Carolina, which also has a full public financing system (and matching funds) for state supreme court elections.

To read the press release issued by WRTL's Indiana-based lawyer go here: [Wisconsin Right to Life files suit against 'Impartial Justice' bill](#) and then [see the lawsuit](#).

To read news accounts in the *Associated Press* and the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, which include Common Cause in Wisconsin's reaction to the WRTL lawsuit, see: [Federal lawsuit filed over Wis. campaign law](#) and [Group sues over public financing of court candidates](#)

Also today, failed 2009 Wisconsin Supreme Court candidate Randy Koschnick, together with the Virginia-based Center for Competitive Politics, a right-wing, anti-reform group, filed a lawsuit against the Impartial Justice law on even broader grounds than WRTL. To find out more, see: [Koschnick suit challenges constitutionality of Impartial Justice](#) -- and to read the complaint, go [here](#).

Read the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign's take: [Best Grinch impersonation of the season](#)

Wisconsin Supreme Court considering recusal amendments

According to the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin, The Wisconsin Supreme Court met in open administrative conference recently to consider proposed amendments to the recusal rule the justices adopted in a 4-3 decision Oct. 28.

The Chief Justice announced that the Oct. 28 order will not go out. She asked Justice Prosser to circulate his recommendations to the full Court soon.

To view today's heated discussion, go to [WisconsinEye.org](#).

Read the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin's opinion in The Cap Times, "[Melanie G. Ramey: High court has another chance to get it right on recusal](#)." Read the full MDN post [here](#).

Articles and Editorials

[Nasty debate over money in court races shows Supreme Court's political divide](#) - The Cap Times

[WI Justice replied on recusal](#) - Gavel Grab

[Justice Roggensack mounts tortured defense of legalized bribery](#) - The Cap Times

REFORM PRIORITY RESOURCES

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

Federal officials show support for public financing of Congressional campaigns

Assistant Senate Majority Leader Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) and House Democratic Caucus Chairman John Larson (D-Conn.) discussed their endorsement of the Fair Elections Now Act early this morning.

Introduced by Durbin and Larson to reduce fundraising pressures on federal candidates, the act offers public funding to qualifying candidates. According to Durbin, fringe candidates would not be allowed to take advantage of public funds.

Watch the entire discussion at the [Center for American Progress Action Fund](#).

Visit Common Cause for more information on the [Fair Elections Now Act](#).

For more information, read the [MDN post](#).

CENSUS/REDISTRICTING

Grassroots organizations are vital for accurate census count

The House census subcommittee emphasized the importance of using grassroots organizations, state and local governments and businesses to ensure every individual is counted in the 2010 census.

The committee held a [hearing](#) to discuss outreach and promotion activities for the 2010 census count on Wednesday,

Dec. 2.

Several [MDN partner organizations](#) are participating in these efforts to make sure each state obtains every benefit.

According to the [Census Project Blog](#), groups representing hard-to-count populations are coordinating activities with the Census Bureau, while also working on their own to tear down significant barriers that keep millions of people from responding to the census.

For more information, read MDN's full post [here](#).

FAIR & IMPARTIAL COURTS

Caperton testimony now available

[Written testimony](#) submitted by the witnesses at the *Caperton* recusal hearing held by the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Courts and Competition Policy is now available. Click on the witnesses' names to be directed to the testimony.

Don't hesitate to contact me with ideas, questions, concerns or observations!

Take care,
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