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ELECTIONS BOARD REJECTS SOFT MONEY BAN--SHAM ISSUE AD REGULATION YET AGAIN

For the second time in less than four months, the Wisconsin State Elections Board today rejected an administrative rule that would have forced disclosure, regulation and source restriction of the unregulated, unlimited and undisclosed soft money currently utilized by outside special interest groups to run campaign ads masquerading as issue advocacy. The vote against adopting the rule, that would have likely gone into effect for the 2006 elections, was 5 to 4 with the three Republican and one Libertarian appointments to the board being joined by the Democratic Party of Wisconsin's appointment, Martha Love. Love also voted against the reform measure last May 19th when it failed to pass by a 5 to 3 margin.

The failure of the State Elections Board to adopt the equivalent of the McCain-Feingold law at the federal level, for Wisconsin, is a tragedy. It will mean that unregulated, undisclosed and unlimited special interest money will inundate the 2006 elections as well as the public policy-making process in the next session of the Legislature. The shadow of massive special interest money will darken the Legislature's consideration of the state budget and every other legislative action beginning in January of 2005.

The commitment of Governor Jim Doyle to this or to any campaign finance reform measure must also be called into serious question yet again. Doyle, the titular head of the state Democratic Party, said he supported this measure but yet again failed to secure enough votes to get it passed. Does anyone seriously doubt that if the Governor had really wanted to see this reform measure passed by the state elections board, that he would have been denied by members of his own political party? The Democratic appointment of Assembly Minority Leader Jim Kreuser (D-Kenosha) to the Elections Board changed his no vote in May to yes in support of the reform measure largely because State Rep. Spencer Black (D-Madison) had 14 Assembly Democrats sign a letter to Kreuser's appointment to the board, Carl Holborn, in support of closing the issue ad loophole in August. Had Governor Doyle called Martha Love--which he did not do--he could have had secured this reform. He did not and the reform measure lost by a single vote.

We will be back next year, relentlessly pushing for reform with or without Governor Doyle's support. But today was a gigantic reform opportunity lost and the citizens of Wisconsin are once again ultimately the biggest losers.

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