

## OPINION

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### Senate should back campaign reform

An editorial — 2/18/2008 8:33 am

The Wisconsin Senate has a huge chance Tuesday to strike a blow for democracy.

Senate Bill 171, which would provide public financing for state Supreme Court races, is on the agenda. Wisconsin senators should pass it and send it to the Assembly, where the fight against it will be tough, but where reason might actually prevail.

The bill, known as the impartial justice bill, provides public financing to candidates for the high court who meet the qualifications to be placed on the ballot and agree to limit their spending to \$400,000.

Should special interests get involved, as they do now, the candidate targeted by independent expenditures would be provided additional public funds to fight back. That would go a long way to take away the incentive that special interests now have to flood the airwaves with attack ads.

The beauty of Senate Bill 171 is that it stands the promise of returning high court elections to the people by removing the influence that big money has in the contests.

Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce, for example, spent millions last year to push the election of conservative Annette Ziegler and is planning to spend millions more this year in an effort to defeat sitting Justice Louis Butler.

Its huge war chest enables it to drown out the message of those without deep pockets.

That subverts the democratic process. The state Senate can take the first step Tuesday to change all that.

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#### Community Comments

Tue, Feb. 19, 2008 9:29 am

scotty c says:

I would like to see full public financing of all state elections like arizona.

we can't do it with a check off system alone.

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