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CURTAIN WMC'S INFLUENCE BEFORE IT OWNS COURT

By [Ed Garvey](#)

If you meet Jim Haney, the head of Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce, you would probably like him. He has a nice smile, seems like he would be a good neighbor, probably doesn't move his ball in the rough.

But listen to him for a while and you will learn that he is perhaps our most dangerous citizen. Indeed, he might not borrow your car without permission but he's out to quietly steal your Supreme Court. I am not making this up. He wants all seven justices in his WMC trophy case, but if he can't have 'em all, five will do.

Jim doesn't enjoy a fair fight. For the past 15 years or so, when he wants a bill passed in the Legislature, he has his staff draft it, gets a compliant legislator to submit it, then the legislator gets the appropriate committee chairs to schedule a "hearing" before the public or the press knows what is happening. (Remember the old saw, "A lie gets halfway around the world before Truth gets her boots on"? A WMC bill is enacted before Truth can find her boots.) The "hearing" is held, and if you have the temerity to testify in opposition, you get the back of the hand. No one pays attention at the hearing other than lobbyists, but the WMC bill usually gets near-unanimous approval, as drafted, and is soon on its way to the floor and from there to the governor for signature.

Haney almost always gets his way in the legislative branch. He has to raise money to support his "retainers," but that is easy for Jim. His members are well healed, and they "invest" in the legislative process, while you and I only "support" a few individuals with hundred-dollar contributions.

Jim's folks don't like to pay taxes, so they told Jim to shift the burden to the consumers and homeowners. The little guys. And Haney made it happen. It used to be that taxpayers his members represented paid the lion's share of property taxes, but no longer. Now those who feel comfortable in the Labor Temple but not the Madison Club pay the lion's share. Want to thank someone? Send a note to Jim Haney.

The Supreme Court of Wisconsin has an independent streak. The justices study the facts, apply the law, and reach a decision. They don't meet with lobbyists. Now, WMC's lawyers have to duke it out in front of the court and, indeed, the public. Sometimes they lose, and Jim doesn't like to lose.

John Grisham, the great novelist, was on "Bill Moyers Journal" last Friday. He told Moyers that 30 states elect local judges and state Supreme Court justices. "That is a bad system" if you allow private money to dominate the elections. "Big money can take out an unsympathetic justice and replace him with a more friendly one." That, says Grisham, is exactly what happened in Mississippi and Alabama. "The hard-right majority overturns virtually every jury award in both states," he said. You can't get justice in Mississippi or Alabama.

Wisconsin is about to join Mississippi and Alabama because Jim Haney says that he will pour \$3 million to \$6 million into the spring Supreme Court election. His goal? Defeat Justice Louis Butler and, as Grisham warned, replace him with a more favorable justice. Soon there will be no tension in the court when WMC appears.

When Vince Lombardi roamed the sidelines, he was captured on film when Green Bay was penalized on successive plays. "What the hell is going on out there!" It was not a question. If I may borrow from Vince, I must holler at the governor and the Legislature: Why in the hell are you not involved in stopping this heist! All seven current justices have boldly asked for public financing of Supreme Court races. They want independence.

What are you waiting for? Godot? And the Bar Association? They appointed a committee to study the situation. What's next? A seminar? Good Lord.

Harold Laski wrote from England, more than a century ago, "The successful lawyer - the group from which the members of the judiciary are mostly drawn - spends his life in ministering to the wealthy in our society. It is natural that he should come, as a general rule, to share its outlook." In other words, even without Haney's multimillion-dollar interference, it is likely that a pro-business winner would emerge. But Haney wants a sure bet.

If you don't like how he shifted the tax burden, wait until he controls your Supreme Court.

It is time to change our system before it changes Wisconsin. Grisham is right. Elect, but only in a fair system.

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