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Posted January 22, 2008

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Column: Seats on Supreme Court for sale to high bidders, special interests

Millions of people throughout the world have been captivated by John Grisham's fictional legal thrillers. But his most recent book, "The Appeal," is all too real.

The story revolves around a big chemical company that has been polluting a local water supply, causing cancer in the area. The company is sued, loses, and appeals the case to the state Supreme Court. In an attempt to win the appeal, the big chemical company recruits a candidate, finances him, manipulates him, markets him, and molds him into their Supreme Court justice.

Sound familiar? It should. While it is fictional, Grisham's story is happening in Wisconsin today. Big businesses, led by Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce (WMC), are trying to eliminate "unfriendly" justices on the Wisconsin Supreme Court and replace them with more "sympathetic" ones. Last year, the group is reported to have spent more than \$3 million to elect a candidate of their liking. This year they will likely spend even more in an effort to unseat Justice Louis Butler.

Why? Because WMC wants the views of big businesses to prevail over those of the consumer when cases go to the Wisconsin Supreme Court -- and they're trying to buy a seat on the court to make it happen. They want to weaken even the most basic legal protections, stacking the deck against everyday Wisconsinites like you and me, all in the name of higher profits.

Any person injured by the misconduct or negligence of others should be able to seek justice, even when taking on the most powerful interests. When big corporations act irresponsibly and cause harm to consumers, refuse to pay fair and just insurance claims, produce unsafe products, or swindle their employees and shareholders, the only way for people to hold them accountable is in our courts.

WMC knows it, and that's why they are doing whatever it takes to dominate the democratic process and buy the Supreme Court.

Our courts need to be fair, impartial and independent. Cases should be judged on the facts and on the law. Big businesses have a right to participate in the process, but they should not be allowed to dominate it. The Constitution was not written for them, it was written for the people.

So this spring when you see TV ad after TV ad after TV ad from WMC, think of who they're looking out for and why they're spending millions of dollars for a Supreme Court candidate.

Christine Bremer Muggli is president of the Wisconsin Association for Justice (formerly the Wisconsin Academy of Trial Lawyers) and is the chief shareholder of Bremer & Trollop Law Offices in Wausau.

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Well, yes and no Wed Feb 13, 2008 12:50 pm

It's true that our system is corrupt and sold to the highest bidder. But still the bidder could be environmental outlook that is devastating to the economy and the planet by letting China and India poison the whole planet. Mautz paint gets hammered for lead paint of 40 years ago, yet no one questions arsenic plywood from China, or hardly question the tons of dangerous and toxic products poured upon us every day. Not to mention the tons of pollution just to ship it all here. How about the calcium chloride on the roads and waterways, now their calling it Beet Juice as if that makes it safer. Who is greasing who, we are already pimped off, now it's just a matter of going down swinging. Maybe we can get back up dust off and start fresh. <http://www.logtrucker.com/magchloride.htm>

Reader Comment Sun Feb 10, 2008 7:12 pm

Thank you Ms. Bremer ...
 I hope many people read your piece.
 It is time to vote for whomever Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce does NOT endorse.

Reader Comment Sat Feb 09, 2008 9:54 pm

Hardly fiction. Grisham just based it on real life politics in the good ole USA. Or maybe he copied it from the so-called "Americans For Prosperity" playbook.

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