

ACLU Fights Back

by Chris Ahmuty, ACLU of Wisconsin Executive Director

After the passage of Wisconsin's biennial state budget and the first bills of the Republican-controlled state legislature, civil libertarians across Wisconsin are asking, "what's next?"

It will take time for legislative solutions to repair deep cuts to critical programs, repeal sweeping changes to voting laws, and restore public employees' rights to collective bargaining. However there are actions the ACLU of Wisconsin is taking today to hold our government accountable for weakening civil liberties in our state. Here's some of what we are working on:

Identifying Voters Disenfranchised by Photo ID Requirements at the Polls Act 23 requires all voters to show one of a limited type of photo IDs in order to cast their ballot beginning in February 2012. For otherwise eligible voters who cannot get a photo ID or who will have to pay for the proof-of-identity documents in order to get an ID to vote, the ACLU of Wisconsin will document their lost rights for use in our efforts to fight back. ACLU attorneys are taking a leading role in researching and developing arguments for a possible legal challenge. ACLU members who can volunteer to help with voter education on the new law can contact us to connect with fellow statewide voting rights coalition groups working on education and poll watching efforts.

Blowing the Whistle on Voucher School Discrimination The new budget includes a significant expansion of the private school voucher program. During the 20 years of vouchers in Milwaukee, we've seen the segregation of students with disabilities into Milwaukee Public Schools as private voucher schools deny their admission or fail to provide adequate services to support their education. This summer, the ACLU and Disability Rights Wisconsin filed a complaint with the United States Department of Justice challenging disability discrimination in the private voucher school program.

Collecting Racial Profiling Stories When the Governor signed the repeal of the racial profiling law, he crippled the ability of law enforcement



professionals and community leaders to create a system measuring racial and ethnic bias in policing. The ACLU of Wisconsin will collect stories from individuals who have experienced biased policing as well as target individual law enforcement agencies for further scrutiny.

Protecting Government Transparency When the legislators who wrote the state budget declared that access to the reports of legislators' economic interests would be limited to those who could travel to Madison to review hard copies in the Government Accountability Office, the ACLU of Wisconsin sounded the alarm. Limiting access to politicians' financial interests is bad for clean government advocates, journalists and everyday citizens who want to know if legislators' decisions are influenced by their economic ties. While Governor Walker ultimately vetoed this policy, he left in the budget other provisions that diminished Wisconsin's tradition of open government. ■

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Don't let our statewide voice for liberty go unheard.

- Sign up for e-action alerts at aclu-wi.org and call your state legislators when important bills are introduced. Feedback from constituents can slow down or stop bad bills.

- Get your friends to sign up for ACLU of Wisconsin action alerts. Membership isn't required, but new members always welcome.

- Forward action alerts to your friends on Facebook and Twitter. Share buttons on every email make spreading the word a click away.

This is what defending free speech looks like: ACLU of WI Foundation Legal Observers at work

During statewide protests in February and March 2011, legal observers witnessed both protest and police activity. These trained volunteers worked alongside labor attorneys and parade marshals to ensure that demonstrators could exercise their peaceful right to protest. Here are some of the words and photos of volunteers who are on the front lines of defending free speech:

“Legal observing is a rewarding experience



because this is what the Bill of Rights looks like in action – it’s a living and breathing document. We have an important role to play in the 21st century. I am happy to be on history’s doorstep.”

– **Angie Trudell Vasquez** is a poet, activist and the Office Manager for the ACLU of Wisconsin in Milwaukee

“It’s so easy to feel helpless at times of political turmoil. Volunteering with the ACLU is



something I can do to make a difference if the actions of law enforcement comes into question and requires even more attention than usual. Even if being a witness at a rally or other event requires that I set aside my own personal opinions, I am

happy to do it to protect the free speech rights of everyone there. And people thank me for being there! That’s super neat.” – **Christie Taylor** is a Madison-area blogger and works in radio.

“At the height of the Capitol protests in Madison, I would do legal observation a little bit at a time



whenever I could: before work, during my lunch hour and when I was done with work. Demonstrators and members of the press were very grateful for the constant presence of ACLU volunteers. On a personal level, it offered

an opportunity to witness history in the making.” – **Martin Alvarado** is a public employee in the Madison area and serves on the ACLU of Wisconsin statewide board

“It is very rewarding to be an ACLU legal observer. Near the start of the recent demonstrations at the Capitol, I handed out over 500 “bust cards” to citizens standing in line to speak at the Joint Finance Committee



hearings. Many of those standing in line were taking action for the first time in their lives. More seasoned demonstrators greeted me with shouts such as “Yeah!” or “Good! The ACLU is here!” – **Dr. Mitzi Duxbury**

was a student protester at UW-Madison in the late 60’s and wishes ACLU observers were present then. Duxbury is retired and volunteers in the Madison Area ACLU Office.

“Being a Legal Observer gives me the opportunity to be another defender of a fundamental right of our Democracy: “Free Speech.” It is great to see people cheering us with their thumps up



and providing us with the encouragement we need to continue fighting to make a positive impact and making a difference in our community.”

– **Omar Barberena** is a bilingual legal observer in Milwaukee.



“Marvelous day for free speech!” – **Mary Ellen Schultz** is another newly trained volunteer who demonstrated as a student and now volunteers as an observer for others to exercise their rights.

Legal observers are on call year-round to help. Contact the Milwaukee or Madison office to find out how you can be a legal observer in your community. ■

Bill of Rights Celebration Recognizes Civil Libertarians Who Make a Difference

On March 19, 2011 we held our annual Bill of Rights Celebration at the Pfister Hotel in Milwaukee. A packed house of over 300 people enjoyed the witty words of Aasif Mandvi from “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart.”

We also honored the following civil libertarians for their accomplishments in the past year: Barbara E. Munson for her work with the Indian Mascot and Logo Taskforce for the Wisconsin Indian Education Association; Bonnie Brusky, Paul Moga, and Tom Wild with the Riverside University High School for their work supporting youth civil libertarians, and tenants at the Lake Bluff Apartments in South Milwaukee who support fair housing practices.

A special thanks to our sponsors including Jackie Boynton, William Lynch, Barbara Manger, and Rep. Fred Kessler and the law firm of Hawks Quindel. Other organizational and media sponsors include:



Speaker Aasif Mandvi.



Award winner Barbara Munson and Aasif Mandvi.



Florence Yarney pictured with award winners Tom Wild, Paul Moga and Bonnie Brusky.



Keep the Book Belleville – Parents and Students Successfully Fight Book Challenge



Congratulations to Belleville area parents and students for winning the Wisconsin Library Association Intellectual Freedom Award for 2011. Belleville book defenders thanked the ACLU of Wisconsin for helping them prepare to argue in support of keeping Chris Crutcher’s “Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes” in their high school English curriculum. For more on this and other stories about fighting censorship in Wisconsin, search for “banned books” on our Cap City Liberty blog. ■

Belleville Parents & Students Recognized for Anti-Censorship Efforts



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The ACLU of WI has a new space! Special thanks to mural artists Andrew Parchman for his ceiling work and Jasmine Barmore (pictured) and Zen Castillo for their work on our youth center wall which will no doubt inspire our youth rights program participants and staff in the years to come. – photographs by Dawn Rundle

Get the ACLU of Wisconsin's News by Email

Are you getting email action alerts and updates from the Wisconsin ACLU? **If not, you aren't on our new email action list!**

This summer the ACLU of Wisconsin will expand our e-action system to update our members and supporters about local and statewide civil liberties news. By subscribing to our email list, you can hear about local ACLU events, legislative action alerts, and opportunities for you to volunteer and get engaged in your community. Sign up today by visiting our homepage at www.aclu-wi.org



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