



News Column

The Price of Free Speech

By

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The free speech rights of Wisconsin business are once again under assault. This time it is not an official government action that is attempting to stifle the voice of the business community, but rather an organized campaign involving misinformation, intimidation, and threats of boycott. The effort is being spearheaded by certain Madison-based politicians, unions, and other like-minded interest groups who feel that the business community, and more specifically WMC, have been too effective at blocking their political and policy agendas.

Whether it is higher business taxes, more regulatory road blocks to creating manufacturing jobs, or an activist majority on the Supreme Court, this faction has failed to convince the public to embrace its liberal agenda. They blame the business community and are now trying to silence the primary voice of the business perspective — the WMC issue advocacy program. In the Alice in Wonderland world of Madison politics, where the virtues of tolerance and diversity are considered sacred, there apparently is no room for an alternative political or policy perspective that strays from liberal orthodoxy.

The campaign to silence WMC includes both the current and former mayors of Madison, a handful of other Dane county politicians, and at least one newspaper editor. They have a website devoted to WMC bashing and a couple of daily blogs. There is a weekly editorial rant in one of the local papers, which usually contains specious accusations of racism. They have organized pickets at WMC events, “meetings” with WMC Board members, and boycotts of WMC member companies. Their objective is to intimidate business leaders into withdrawing their voice from the marketplace of ideas. That way they ensure that the public is exposed to the only “true and correct” political and policy perspective as expressed by WEAC and the Greater Wisconsin Committee.

This misguided effort fails to account for the fact that Wisconsin business leaders are neither stupid nor cowards. As our economy sags and we continue to bleed manufacturing jobs, the WMC leadership is more resolved than ever to advocate for sensible policies aimed at improving the business climate and creating jobs in Wisconsin. They feel the business community has an obligation to help policy makers and the general public understand how high taxes and increasing regulation harm our competitiveness. They also believe that public disclosure of the voting records and policy positions of elected officials, be they members of the legislature or the Supreme Court, contributes to a healthy democratic process. And they are most firmly committed to ensuring that the public debate on politics and policy is not reduced to a monologue of left wing rhetoric.