

WAS TOM LOFTUS A FELON?

CHANGING STANDARDS, DOUBLE STANDARDS IN WISCONSIN'S "CAUCUS" SCANDAL

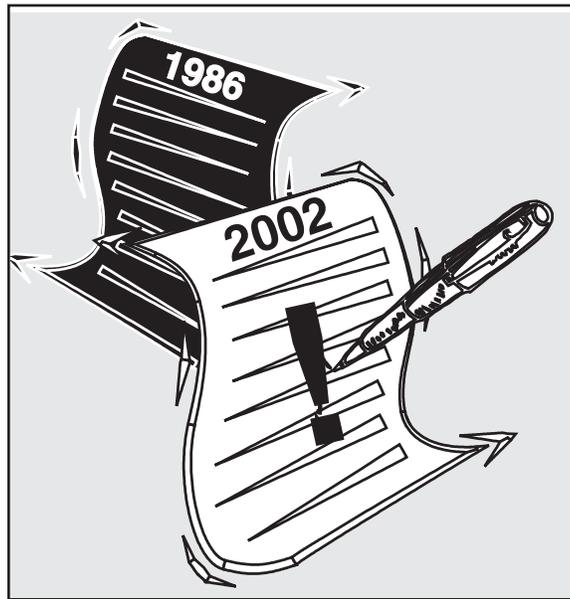
CHARLES J. SYKES

In late November 1986, the speaker of the Assembly received an extraordinary 10-page memo. Had it been written a few years later, it might have been a smoking gun — exhibit A in an investigation of public corruption.

As it was, the memo was unnoticed by investigators and the bloodhounds of the Capitol press corps. Speaker Tom Loftus went on to become his party's candidate for governor, ambassador to Norway, and a media icon of political integrity.

But in page after page of extraordinary detail, the 1986 memo outlined how members of the Assembly Democratic Caucus staff — under Loftus's direction — had devoted their time to political campaigns. Those activities are now regarded as felonies in Madison. Defending his charges against Loftus's successor, Scott Jensen, Dane County District Attorney Brian Blanchard recently wrote: "Members of the Assembly are not elected to use taxpayer money to run private political campaigns."

In his ruling binding over former Speaker Jensen and Majority Leader Steve Foti for trial, Dane County Judge Daniel Moeser declared:



"Nowhere can I find or conclude that it is the duty of a legislator to get re-elected. And at least with regard to the argument . . . that somehow there is a duty to get re-elected, a duty to elect a certain party member, a duty to recruit candidates. I don't think those are legitimate state duties under any stretch of the imagination."

But is this a new standard?

This is the way Loftus described his role:

As the Speaker, I was the chairman, chief fund-raiser, and strategy maven of the Assembly Democratic Campaign Committee. Although raising and giving money to others once was a way for all state legislators to gain support, now it is the particular job of the speaker or the minority leader.

That attitude is reflected in the memo to Loftus, which proudly recounted how legislative staffers had run campaigns, helped raise money, written political commercials, developed campaign literature, operated "spy"

Charles J. Sykes is the editor of WI:Wisconsin Interest and a senior fellow of the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute. He also hosts a talk-radio show on AM 620 WTMJ in Milwaukee.

phone banks, provided writing and research, orchestrated campaign swings, helped with mailings, and traveled to local districts to make campaign phone calls and go door-to-door for candidates. According to the memo, Caucus staffers had "total control" of campaign services to candidates, were in daily contact with campaigns and "felt they were actually a part of the campaigns."

Their efforts provided a direct benefit to Loftus, who was able to maintain his majority and his hold on the speaker's chair. Nowhere in the memo do caucus staffers suggest that any of the campaign work was done on their own time.

One of a series of records documenting the political climate of the Capitol under Democratic rule, the memo — along with Loftus's own political memoirs — paints a picture of Assembly leaders deeply immersed in fund-raising and running campaigns as an integral part of their jobs.

After eighteen months of John Doe investigation, in which immunity was granted to over fifty legislators and staff, District Attorney Blanchard was not able to come up with anything even remotely comparable to the Loftus memo. Instead, his investigation ended only with allegations that one Assembly staffer (Sherry Schultz) was assigned to work on campaigns, that several others on partial leave may have worked more hours on campaigns and less on state work than reflected on their time sheets, and that some others, as one Capitol insider puts it, "may have occasionally blurred the already blurry line in their offices between what was politics and what was policy."

But in 1986, not only was the politicking not prosecuted criminally, it was apparently conducted quite openly. In the Loftus memo, the caucus unapologetically reports — actually brags about — its full-time systematic campaign operation.

Names are named. Legislators clearly knew what was going on; and it is difficult to imagine political reporters covering any of the races described in the memo being unaware of

the extent to which the caucus was running the show. (Many of those same reporters now breathlessly report the caucus scandal as if it had unearthed previously unknown activities. See Sidebar.)

The Memo

The memo from the caucus staff, dated November 24, 1986, is essentially a complete blueprint of the political activities of the Assembly Democratic caucus under Loftus during the 1986 campaign.

Each member of the Caucus Staff was assigned three candidates, one non-incumbent and two incumbents. S/he had total responsibility for services to the candidate. For example, if a letter to farmers was needed, the agriculture analyst would write it but the responsible staffer would make sure it stressed campaign themes, etc.

This system worked well. The staff felt they were actually part of the campaigns and worked hard to provide needed services. In addition, they were in daily touch with the incumbents and served as an early warning system if campaign plans were falling behind schedule or negative issues surfaced. The graphics staff and radio person were not assigned candidates since their workload is so heavy with all the campaigns.

Far from expressing concern that their activities might be controversial or perhaps even illegal, the caucus memo to Loftus suggests that, in the future, "it would be a good idea to bring the assigned staff person into the campaign strategy process as soon as possible. . . . By including the staffer, a better media plan could be laid out earlier and teams could be developed better throughout all the literature."

The memo also makes clear that members of individual legislators' staffs played integral roles in the re-election campaigns of the incumbents. "One of our best assets in the incumbent campaigns was each legislator's staff," the memo boasted.

But the caucus staff clearly wanted to stress the central — and irreplaceable — role it

had played in key legislative races. In the eightieth assembly district, for example, the caucus memo complained that incumbent Robert Thompson “did very little door to door.”

Faced with a disorganized local campaign, the caucus staff “provided a budget and timeline.” In fact, however, that was just the beginning. According to the memo to Loftus, “by the second week in October, we had a complete spy phone bank [sic] and started a volunteer voter ID phone bank.”

Caucus staffers also “increased radio buys, . . . decreased newspaper buys, added an extra mailing to voters, a Feingold letter, a letter to undecideds and implemented a [Get Out the Vote] strategy.”

So central was the role of the Assembly Democratic caucus staff that the memo sneers that “the best thing that could happen to Rep. Thompson in 1988 would be the dissolution of his local campaign committee.”

The memo makes clear that the efforts on behalf of Representative Thompson were by no means isolated. In the thirty-sixth assembly district, then represented by John Volk, the caucus staffers reported that, at Volk’s request:

We developed his entire campaign budget. We wrote and designed a district-wide postal patron mailing, produced and bought extensive radio and newspaper ads.

In the twenty-ninth assembly district, then represented by Dick Shoemaker, the caucus staffers also ran a “spy phone bank to determine Shoemaker’s strength in the district and helped on media — worked on a brochure, drafted some letters and provided radio services.”

Caucus staffers also helped State Representative Wayne Wood write “the copy for most of his media.”

In a section of the memo subtitled “Services to Candidates,” the Assembly Democratic Caucus notes that “in addition to daily work and the legislative roll calls, the caucus provided a number of services to candidates (not just targeted candidates).”

For Margaret Baldwin, caucus staffers provided graphics assistance, as well as writing and research, and a radio ad. For Representatives Bell and Black, the caucus staffers provided graphics for brochures. For

Representative Peter Bock, the caucus provided graphics for campaign letters and two sample ballots. In addition caucus staffers bragged that they had also helped set up a phone bank for Bock, “trained volunteers, recruited, trained and supervised poll workers, [and] coordinated [a] write-in campaign [Get Out The Vote].”

On behalf of other candidates, the caucus told Loftus that it had written copy for plant

gate flyers (Rogers), hired “in-district staff to supervise campaign” (Shoemaker), provided photography (more than a dozen candidates), produced radio ads attacking Republican opponents (Wilbur), and worked to have opponents denied public financing (Looby).”

On behalf of one candidate (Randall), the caucus staff proudly told Loftus that it had provided graphics help for brochures, door hangers and cards, as well as research and a graph on the Republican incumbent’s attendance, salary, and per diem. In addition, caucus staffers “wrote and produced 2 straight-copy ads, wrote 2 negative ads, and [sic] Proxmire ad.”

*But the caucus staff
clearly wanted to stress
the central — and
irreplaceable — role it
had played in key
legislative races.*

Caucus staffers were eager to document the extent of their politicking. They also claimed credit for orchestrating:

Hephner agricultural swing; helped Joe Golden qualify for public finance and research Republican public finance qualifications and nomination papers; provided the general memos on election laws; drafted radio ads on [Tommy] Thompson/UW and Thompson/environment; arranged counteroffensive to GOP press conferences in La Crosse, Appleton, Wausau, and Racine; researched and set up Loftus/Hephner press conference on Thompson's farm policy; traveled to districts to phone and go door to door, help with mailings and other campaign efforts.

Double Standards

Why are the revelations about Tom Loftus so interesting? In part because they explode the media's storyline that the caucus "scandal" represents something new, shocking, and far worse than anything that happened in the past.

Last July 28, *Wisconsin State Journal* Associate Editor Tom Still wrote a column lauding Loftus's extraordinary integrity:

Democrat Loftus wasn't afraid to exercise power during his long tenure as speaker in the 1980s and early 1990s, but he stayed on the ethical side of the line. He controlled himself, and the internal yet informal disciplinary structure of the Legislature made sure that he did. Today, that structure appears to have broken down because personal and institutional discipline has been devalued. . .

Beyond that, the Loftus memos raise several obvious questions for both Blanchard and the media. Why were Loftus's activities considered a non-story and business-as-usual, while the much narrower activities of Speaker Scott Jensen are treated as a scandal of major proportions?

How will Blanchard distinguish the political activities of the caucus at Loftus's apparent direction from the more limited activities for which he wants to put Scott Jensen in jail?

What about the editorial boards of the *Journal Sentinel* and the *Wisconsin State Journal*? Both have championed the investigations and called for Jensen's head. Why do they think that the allegations against Jensen, a Republican, warrant felony charges, while Loftus's far more egregious behavior would not? And if they cannot make a clear distinction, why do they continue to lionize Loftus, while treating Jensen like a crook?

As recently as December 26, the *State Journal* cited Loftus in glowing terms in calling for political courage in the State Capitol. "Former Speaker Thomas Loftus captured it best," the editorial board wrote, quoting Loftus as saying: "Leaders face real temptations and need institutional restraints that cannot be written into codes and laws." Apparently Loftus knew better than we knew.

The Loftus Pattern

After I reported on the Loftus memo in January, Loftus told the *State Journal* "he doesn't recall receiving the memo." He also questioned "whether the author may have mixed up the role of staffers working on their own time for the Assembly Democratic Campaign Committee, or ADCC, with those working on government time."

The newspaper also quoted Ed Blume, who worked at the Assembly Democratic Caucus for eight years before leaving as director in July 1986, saying "the activities described in the memo were the type his staffers did strictly on their own time."

But other documents raise questions about those denials, including notes in Loftus's own handwriting setting up a campaign fund-raiser that would involve caucus staffers, precisely the sort of activities for which Assembly Republican leaders have been charged with felonies. No Assembly Democrat has yet been charged.

Other memos from Blume, the former caucus director, outline how caucus staffers were assigned to "desk" certain districts during the 1986 campaign, and recommend using state

employee legislative staffers and computers to compile voter lists that can be used in campaigns. He also suggests using legislative office accounts to pay outside vendors for inputting names in the lists that were being compiled for the legislators' re-election campaigns.

"While Feeling Is Good"

On December 3, 1986 — a week and a half after Loftus received the caucus memo outlining its political activities — the chairman of the La Crosse County Democratic Party wrote a letter to Linda Barth-Sutter, who was then the acting director of the Assembly Democratic Caucus. In the letter, attorney Brent Smith said that he wanted to thank Barth-Sutter "and all of the other members from the Assembly Caucus, Senate Caucus, et cetera," who had helped with the recount in the Assembly election won by Democrat Virgil Roberts.

"It was also a pleasure to get to know many of you from the Caucus and we look forward to working with you on other projects in the future," he wrote.

On a copy of the letter I've obtained, Loftus writes, "Maybe we should have event there while feeling is good?"

The suggestion was apparently followed up quickly. By December 19, Brent Smith was writing to Linda Barth-Sutter — addressed to "Assembly Democratic Caucus, STATE CAPITOL" — with a list of La Crosse party members "who might be willing to act as sponsors for the fundraiser on February 10th."

Even though the fund-raiser was ostensibly sponsored by the Assembly Democratic Campaign Committee, when the invitations for the fund-raiser were printed, they were delivered to the Assembly Democratic Caucus

offices at the State Capitol. The receipt was signed by: Linda Barth-Sutter.

A press release from the La Crosse party indicates that the event would be attended by Loftus, Majority Leader Tom Hauke, and Joint Finance Chairman Marlin Schneider, "the leaders who will be shaping the 1987 Legislative Session."

"Desking"

In late 1985, Blume was director of the Assembly Democratic Caucus. As Democrats prepared to defend their majority in the Assembly, Blume wrote a memo (November 5, 1985) to then State Representative Jeff Neubauer outlining the caucus's role in the upcoming campaign.

"Within the caucus," he wrote, "we have the materials and expertise to pull together many of the details for a specific plan for the priority districts."

"In fact," he wrote, "each analyst has a district that he or she has been following since the beginning of the session." Each of those caucus staffers, Blume wrote, "also wants to 'desk' their

district during the campaign season." (This seems to parallel the statement in the caucus memo a year later that "Each member of the Caucus staff was assigned three candidates . . . S/he has total responsibility for services to the candidate.")

Blume explained that "desking" meant "monitoring and supporting the campaign in the district.

While Blume and Loftus now insist that the writer of the 10-page 1986 memo confused the role of staffers for the caucus and staffers for the Assembly Democratic Campaign Committee, Blume's 1985 memo makes clear the distinction. Under his "desking" plan, each

He also suggests using legislative office accounts to pay outside vendors for inputting names in the lists that were being compiled for the legislators' re-election campaigns.

How The Press Changed The Rules And Covered Their Own Backsides.

An extensive trail of memos and memoirs make it clear that Wisconsin legislative staffers were running campaigns and raising money out of the partisan caucuses for the better part of two decades.

Did the media miss the story? Did reporters overlook the political activities under their noses?

As the "caucus scandal" has unfolded, Capitol reporters and editorial writers have been SHOCKED! to learn that legislative staffers had often moonlighted as campaign operatives.

But throughout the 1990s, reporters for the major state newspapers repeatedly, even routinely, wrote stories about the caucuses that cited their political role. Indeed, throughout the 1990s, some of the same reporters who continue to write about the "scandal" often relied on caucus staffers as sources on senate and assembly elections — and quoted them openly and extensively.

The media didn't miss the story. Nor did reporters avert their eyes. To the contrary, reporters knew perfectly well what was going on. They simply did not consider it to be a scandal, especially since they were using the caucuses as sources.

As one legislative aide points out: "The historical record is clear and striking. Reporters and staff of the state's largest newspapers systematically and regularly solicited lawmakers and staff on state time, in state office buildings, over state telephones for campaign information."

Many of the stories explicitly reported that the caucuses were political arms of their legislative leaders.

In June 1998, for example, The *Wisconsin State Journal* ran a story under the headline: "Lund named caucus director for Democrats' fall campaign." The story reported "Assembly Democratic leader Rep. Shirley Krug named a new caucus director Tuesday to help run this fall's elections campaigns. . . . She faces a difficult task this fall of defending the seats of 12 Democrats who are retiring while attempting to win five additional seats to capture control of the 99-member Wisconsin Assembly."

When the *State Journal* reported on the hiring of Andrew Gussert as the director of the Senate Democratic caucus in January 1999, the story noted, "the job is also political, however, as the director also helps recruit candidates for office and run campaigns. He replaces Joanna Richard, who is credited with helping the Democrats retake control of the state Senate."

Richard, of course, went on to become a top aide for Jim Doyle.

The next month, the *State Journal* reported, "Tanya Bjork, formerly political director for U.S. Senator Russ Feingold, D-Wis., was named head of the Assembly Democratic Caucus — a taxpayer-funded position that lawmakers use to help recruit candidates and win elections."

Nowhere is there any suggestion that this was either scandalous or illegal.

And so it went, through dozens of stories.

As far back as 1992, Matt Pommer, writing in the *Capital Times* about the newly hired director of the Senate Republican Caucus, said that Matthews "will play a key role in upcoming special elections in which Republicans hope to regain control of the Senate for the first time since 1974. Matthews will replace Jim Tenuta as head of the caucus staff. Tenuta reportedly was warned earlier this year that he would be replaced unless Republicans won control of the Senate."

There is no evidence that Pommer referred this information to the DA's office.

In 1993, reporters for both the *State Journal* and the *Cap Times* repeatedly and routinely contacted caucus staffers for comment and insight on upcoming campaigns. When Republican candidate Rick Skindrud began attacking a candidate named June Sieling, it was Representative Travis and Assembly Caucus Director Julia Sherman who responded in the *Wisconsin State Journal* (6/21/93).

Reporting on the same campaign, the *Capital Times* quoted Assembly Republican Caucus director Brian Schimming as defending Skindrud, identifying Schimming as “a Republican Assembly caucus staffer and an advisor for the Skindrud campaign.”

The political activities of the caucus were apparently so well known to reporters that they provided fodder for humorous items in the paper. In July 1993, the *State Journal* ran this item:

A little advice for state legislative staffers who occupy the DiVall building at 100 North Hamilton: Remember the public address system carries to both the third and fourth floors. The significance? Friday, someone announced a Republican Assembly caucus staff meeting at Buck’s tavern in five minutes to discuss the upcoming Kenosha Assembly race. Unbeknownst to the fourth floor GOP caucus, the announcement also went to the third floor, home of the Assembly Democratic Caucus. Needless to say, both staffs, including Dem Caucus Director Julia Sherman and GOP Caucus Director Brian Schimming, made a beeline to the bar.

The next month (8/10/93), the *State Journal* reported that Senate Democratic Caucus leader Merle McDonald had fired four staffers, describing McDonald as having been “brought on by Democrat Leader Robert Jauch as part of an effort to revive the political fortunes of Senate Democrats.”

In 1994, *Wisconsin State Journal* reporter Jeff Mayers reported that Republicans had recruited an Indian leader to run against Senator Bob Jauch and quoted Senate Republican Caucus director Mike Rogowski openly commenting on his role in recruiting Jauch’s challenger and the party’s campaign strategy.

In June 1994, the *Cap Times’* Matt Pommer identified Assembly Republican caucus director Brian Schimming and Assembly Speaker Wally Kunicki’s aide, Charlie Gonzalez, as “the top political operatives for the Assembly.” He would undoubtedly have been SHOCKED! to learn that they had, in fact, engaged in political work on state time.

When Tom Still analyzed the political landscape and political strategies in 1994, he contacted Senator Joe Wineke, Dave Travis, and caucus director Schimming for insight.

A *State Journal* story in October 1994 on a radio commercial for a Democratic Assembly candidate quotes Assembly Democratic Caucus director Julia Sherman who explains how the ad was put together.

When Democratic fund-raising tactics stirred controversy in 1996, the *Wisconsin State Journal* story quoted Senate Democratic Caucus director Joanna Richard discussing campaign strategy and defending spending by an independent Democratic group. Similarly in a story on the dispute in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, it is Richard who defends the activities of the DLCC.

When reporter Jeff Mayers analyzed campaign contributions to the two parties in October 1996, he identified Richard as “the director of the Senate Democratic Caucus, the political arm of the Senate Democratic majority.”

Three days earlier, *State Journal* reporter Mike Flaherty had detailed the campaign work of caucus staffers in the 1996 election. The headline on the story: “Cost of caucus workers reaches \$2.6 million: They’re campaigning part-time and full-time for the re-election of their Democrat and Republican bosses.”

There were no criminal investigations.

The practice of staffers moving off and onto campaign payrolls was also well known and extensively reported. In October 1998, for example, reporter Steve Walters reported in the *Journal Sentinel* there was nothing new about the dual role of staffers. “Elected Wisconsin officials — governors and legislators from both parties — have moved aides from state to campaign payrolls and back after the election for decades.”

caucus analyst “would be in daily contact with the candidate, ADCC staff, campaign manager, legislative assigned asshole [sic], and others who know what is happening and what’s needed.”

Blume does suggest that most of these activities “can take place from the ADCC office and analysts’ homes,” but to date there has been no investigation to determine whether the activities took place on the staffers’ personal time. In the 1986 caucus memo, there is no mention of staffers undertaking campaign work while they were on leave or on vacation.

Blume’s 1985 memo, however, makes clear how central he thought the caucus staffers would be in the upcoming campaign.

The director of the caucus bragged that his staffers were “some of the most experienced campaign staff in the Capitol. Steve McKay has worked extensively on campaigns in the northwestern part of the state. Jonathan Sender has managed Assembly campaigns and phone banks. Dave Haskin, Linda Barth-Sutter, Jim Cieri, and I have been through several campaign cycles.”

Computerized Polling Lists

In another indication that Democrats under Loftus blurred the line between policy and politics, Blume at one point recommended that incumbent legislators use their own state employee staff members and state computers to compile computerized voting lists that could be used in the campaign.

In a June 26, 1985 memo to Loftus, Loftus’s successor Wally Kunicki, Neubauer, and Representative Thompson, on the subject of Assembly Democratic Campaign Committee activities, the caucus director specifically addressed the question of whether taxpayer-funded office accounts could be tapped for the development of campaign lists.

“Can office accounts be used to pay outside vendors for inputting or computer use?” Blume asked. “Or, should incumbents use campaign committee funds for computerizing their lists.”

Blume recommended that the taxpayers foot the bill.

“Currently, incumbents use office staff to type poll lists onto mailing label matrices, so I think incumbents’ staff can be used.”

He explicitly cites the use of state-owned caucus equipment, suggesting that “the software and computers in the caucus staff office can be used, but the machines probably cannot handle the load.”

Finally, he suggests that incumbent’s state employee staffs “could be used to input data on computers made available by private vendors, with the cost of the computer time coming from office accounts. (Tom Melvin thinks that office accounts have already been used to pay computer vendors.)”

The memo seems to provide explicit evidence that at minimum Assembly Democrats actively considered the direct use of tax dollars to fund campaign activities. None of this, however, was ever the subject either of media investigative reporting or criminal investigations.

The Fund Raisers

One of the felony charges against former Speaker Scott Jensen involves his use of a state employee to raise money for campaigns.

The implication in the charges — and the media coverage — is that this is something new, more outrageous, and more scandalous than the activities of his predecessors.

At a preliminary hearing on the charges against Jensen and Majority Leader Mickey Foti, Carrie Richard, a former aide to Jensen, said she planned between 30 and 40 fund-raisers for his campaign committee from his Capitol office, often consulting with him about select lobbyists to hit up for donations. Jensen and Foti have also been charged with assigning aide Sherry Schultz to fundraising activities.

But the memos from the Loftus era suggest that staffers performed identical roles for the Democratic Speaker.

The documents detail the explicit involvement of state employees in campaign fund-raising — including the creation of a fund-raising call list by an employee of the Assembly Democratic caucus.

In an 11-page memo dated August 28, 1985, caucus staffer Linda Barth-Sutter — who would later become acting director of the Assembly Democratic Caucus — wrote a memo to State Representative Walter Kunicki, who would later succeed Loftus as Speaker. In 1985, Kunicki was running the fund-raising operation of the Assembly Democratic Campaign Committee; he was the “bagman” for Assembly Democrats.

Barth-Sutter’s memo forwarded to Kunicki a list of “PAC fund-raising assignments,” apparently drawn up by the caucus staffer. The fund-raising list assigned specific legislators various PACs to hit up for campaign cash.

But it was Loftus (and later Kunicki) as Speaker who was the party’s chief fund-raiser.

Indeed, Loftus took his role as chief fund-raiser so seriously that he would, at times, act as the bagman for fellow legislators, soliciting campaign checks with the recipients’ names left blank, and hand out cash in the offices of the State Capitol itself. Specifically, he distributed campaign contributions in the offices of the Assembly Democratic Caucus.

These revelations were not uncovered by intrepid investigative reporting, or by a John Doe investigation. They were described by Loftus himself.

In his book *The Art of Legislative Politics*, Loftus tells this story:

One primary election night at a party organized to watch the election results, I sta-

tioned myself inside the doorway and asked each person entering (I knew most of them) to give me a small check made out to a specific Democratic candidate for the Assembly. This required a rapid-fire sales pitch to explain what I was doing and get them reaching for their checkbooks. Soon there was a whole separate line of party-goers writing checks to candidates they did not know because it was a way to keep the Democrats in the majority. When enough was raised for one candidate, I started on the next. Then I started to collect checks with the payor [sic] left blank in order to be able to have some flexibility to do more to the big talkers, the candidates who never raise the money they claimed they would.

By 9:00 PM I had well over 100 checks stuffed in my inside coat pocket, and I hustled up State Street to the Capitol two blocks away. Gathered there from various parts of the state were about a dozen candidates . . . milling about the staff office of the Democratic caucus. I distributed the checks so each would have enough money to reach the \$1,000 threshold required to qualify . . . for [public funding].

Take note: Loftus describes not only handing out the campaign checks in the State Capitol itself, but in the “staff office of the Democratic caucus.”

At the time of Loftus’s confession, the book generated no controversy. Nothing in Loftus’s description of his role as Speaker set off any alarms. Instead it was hailed as a detailed and accurate description of the way politics was routinely practiced in the State Capitol. Loftus’s memoir was supported by the Evjue Foundation of Madison and the Kohl Foundation of Milwaukee. Loftus also acknowledged that former *Milwaukee Sentinel* capitol reporter Neil Shively had read the draft and offered editorial advice.

*[Loftus] distributed
campaign contributions
in the offices of the
Assembly Democratic
Caucus.*

Since much of the “caucus scandal” centers around campaign fund-raising, Loftus’s description of his style of shaking down lobbyists for campaign cash is also interesting:

“It’s easy to ask for money if you’re the speaker,” he wrote.

All conversations are about the same. The road builders were big contributors to the caucus committees, and their lobbyists would receive several calls a week. If I called, and you’re in the room, this is what you would hear:

Speaker: Jim, this is Tom. How are you today?

Lobbyist: Quite good. Thank you for asking Mr. Speaker. How can I help you?

Speaker: The campaign committee is having a fund-raiser the first night of the session, right after we adjourn, and I hope a few of your clients can attend.

Jim: I assume it is at the upper crust.

Speaker: That is right. We are trying to raise \$30,000.00 at this event, and I hope the road builders can help. At the last event I think your guys she gave \$5,000.00. Do you think that’s in the ballpark for this time?

Jim: I don’t know. But I will do what I can, and I will see you on the twenty-fifth.

Nowhere does he suggest that the fund-raising calls were made outside of the Capitol.

Even so, his activities were not reported by the media, nor were they the subject of any criminal investigation.

Were the media simply blind? Were prosecutors asleep while legislative staffers were systematically recruited as political foot soldiers and the Speaker turned his office into a campaign cash machine? Or have the standards of acceptable conduct been changed?

This spring, Loftus was the graduation speaker at the graduation ceremonies of UW’s LaFollette School of Public Affairs.

Scott Jensen is awaiting trial.