

One Wisconsin Now: Calls for state ethics investigation of Sen. Vukmir's sleazy fundraising deal

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Madison, Wisconsin — State Senator Leah Vukmir, an announced Republican candidate the U.S. Senate, may have run afoul of state ethics requirements with a sleazy deal to raise campaign cash to fuel her federal political ambitions, according to a complaint filed by One Wisconsin Now Executive Director Scot Ross. [In a filing with the Wisconsin Ethics Commission](#), Ross called for a probe of Vukmir's naming the chair of the Board of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) to her U.S. Senate campaign finance committee for possible violations of ethics prohibitions on elected officials using their position and action, or inaction, on legislative matters in exchange for "anything of value."

"Leah Vukmir, with her position on the Joint Finance Committee and in the State Senate majority, has influence over the operations of WEDC and the ability to help or hurt the organization," said Ross. "Naming the head of the WEDC board, a state government entity she helps oversee, to the campaign finance team raising money to fuel her political ambitions isn't just in bad taste, it may very well be in violation of the law."

In a press release dated September 21, the day the 2017 state budget was signed into law, Vukmir's U.S. Senate campaign announced members of her fundraising team, entrusted with helping raise campaign cash. Among the members of the money team is Lisa Mauer, Chair of the Board of Directors of WEDC since July 2016 and a member of the board since WEDC's inception in 2011.

Wisconsin State Statute 19.45(3), governing ethics requirements for legislators reads:

“No person may offer or give to a state public official, directly or indirectly, and no state public official may solicit or accept from any person, directly or indirectly, anything of value if it could reasonably be expected to influence the state public official’s vote, official actions or judgment, or could reasonably be considered as a reward for any official action or inaction on the part of the state public official ...”

The complaint notes that as a member of the powerful Joint Committee on Finance and in the majority party in the State Senate, Vukmir has great influence over the budgets, operations and activities of state agencies, including WEDC. As a member of Vukmir’s team shaking down donors for campaign cash, Mauer is in a position to deliver items of value, namely campaign cash, to remain in the state legislator’s good graces and help fuel her federal political ambitions.

For its part, WEDC has been plagued by scandal from its inception. Scathing audits found employees using public funds to purchase liquor, tickets to sports events and iTunes gift cards and uncovered rampant mismanagement including losing track of loans and failing to verify jobs promised in exchange for state tax dollars. A review of who the agency was giving money to by One Wisconsin Now found that businesses whose owners, directors or employees contributed to the campaign of Scott Walker received over sixty percent of dollars awarded by the jobs agency.

Ross concluded, “Leah Vukmir has watched as Gov. Walker used WEDC as a cash cow for his campaigns and it sure looks like she wants in on the action now that she’s set her sights on federal office.”