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## **ZIEGLER'S DISHONOR WELL-DESERVED CONFLICTS OF INTEREST ARE ONLY GOING TO BECOME MORE FREQUENT AND SIGNIFICANT IN WISCONSIN'S JUDICIAL SYSTEM.**

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Justice Annette Ziegler deserved a stiffer penalty than her colleagues on the Wisconsin Supreme Court delivered Wednesday.

Yet Ziegler now holds the dubious distinction of being the only Wisconsin Supreme Court justice to ever be disciplined by her fellow justices.

That is a serious and well-deserved dishonor.

It also should put every judge on notice across the state that Ziegler's behavior was terribly wrong and better not be repeated.

Prior to her election to the state's high court in April 2007, Ziegler broke "a bright-line rule" in the Code of Judicial Conduct by presiding over nearly a dozen cases in which she had a conflict of interest, the Wisconsin Supreme Court determined in a near-unanimous decision released Wednesday.

Ziegler, then a Washington County Circuit judge, failed to recuse herself from cases involving West Bend Savings Bank even though her husband was serving on the bank's board of directors.

Ziegler's misconduct "diminishes public confidence in the legal system" even though she made the right decisions in the 11 cases and didn't benefit financially from them, the Supreme Court concluded. Her violations also were "serious" and "willful," the court determined.

The court, however, stopped short of censuring, suspending or removing Ziegler from office because her violations did not involve "some degree of moral culpability," the court wrote.

Because elections for the state's high court have become so awash in partisan politics, it's important to note that all of the court's perceived conservatives agreed that Ziegler violated ethics rules and deserved the public reprimand. Ziegler ran for election as a conservative.

The only justice who dissented from Thursday's decision was outgoing Justice Louis Butler, considered to be more liberal. Butler objected only for procedural reasons. Ziegler didn't participate in the court's deliberations over her fate.

The court should have gone further with a censure or suspension. Yet the court's rebuke of Ziegler ought to serve as an important precedent for holding judges accountable.

Conflicts of interest are only going to become more frequent and significant in Wisconsin's judicial system. That's because of the increasingly political nature of high court elections, which include fat donations to campaigns from parties who will likely appear some day in front of the same judges they financially supported or opposed.

No judge in Wisconsin should dare be so sloppy as Ziegler was. And Ziegler had better recuse herself judiciously in the future because more conflicts are sure to arise.