

# Dem leaders look to 2018, optimistic for a favorable redistricting ruling

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The Dems' top legislative leaders expressed optimism about their party's 2018 chances, even as no clear gubernatorial candidate has emerged to challenge Gov. Scott Walker in his expected re-election bid.

But the two, especially Assembly Minority Leader Peter Barca, are pinning much of their hopes on a federal court decision about whether the GOP-drawn 2011 Assembly redistricting maps are unconstitutional.

"I think Gov. Walker is vulnerable," Senate Minority Leader Jennifer Shilling told a [WisPolitics.com](http://www.wispolitics.com) luncheon March 16, citing his low approval rating, which has been underwater since early 2015 when he became a presidential candidate.

Pointing to the candidates who are considering a run for governor as evidence of energy within the party, Barca, D-Kenosha, said a primary would "generate a lot of interest and excitement."

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"I don't think it would be a bad idea to have a primary," he said.

Those potential candidates include Sen. Kathleen Vinehout, Rep. Dana Wachs and former Sen. Tim Cullen, among others.

In terms of other races, Shilling, D-La Crosse, said while Dems will have to work to protect Vinehout and Sen. Janet Bewley, who are both up for re-election next year, they'll "have some opportunities to be on the offensive as well," such as in southwestern Wisconsin.

Barca also pointed to the northwestern part of the state, where “Trump unexpectedly did better than we thought, [and] Hillary did worse than we thought” as “an area with potential growth.”

But he concluded that more Dem gains would come from a new set of maps, which he said would have a “tidal wave effect.”

“If you do redistricting, all of a sudden you have another seat in Racine, you have three more seats in Milwaukee,” he said. “All of a sudden, it’s a whole new ball game.”

A federal panel last year ruled the maps were an unconstitutional partisan gerrymander and has since ordered lawmakers and Walker to draw up new maps by Nov. 1. Attorney General Brad Schimel appealed the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court at the end of February.

Still, responding to comments from the audience, Shilling acknowledged other challenges Dems face — including messaging.

“That’s part of our problems as Democrats, that we love to get in the weeds, and we feel like we need to dig down” she said. “We need to realize that we need to talk about issues in a way that connect with people because we all lead really busy lives.”

After a scolding from an audience member, Shilling also named four issues she thinks Democrats should stand for and tout in 2018: education, roads, health care and jobs.

“You know what Democrats stand for? Good schools, good roads, good jobs and health care, that’s what Democrats stand for,” she said. “So we need to tighten it up.”

The two leaders were also encouraged to be more strategic. Barca said Republicans have prioritized their individual and party interests over those of the public in order to create a long-term plan.

Citing GOP “restrictive” voting provisions, Barca said he believes in putting “your country first and your party second,” but concluded “that’s now what’s happening now.”

“I honestly believe they were willing to put their personal interests about the public interest, and for me personally, I’m not willing to do that,” he said.

Meanwhile, Shilling identified two GOP-backed “cancers in our democracy: Citizens United and redistricting.”

“They have been chipping away for a long time to get where they’re at. The role of the minority is to get into party, the role of the majority is to keep power,” she said. “So they make all the rules, we need to keep talking about our message.”

Listen to the luncheon:

[soundcloud.com/wispolitics/luncheon-with-rep-barca-sen-shilling/s-jsl5Q](https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/luncheon-with-rep-barca-sen-shilling/s-jsl5Q)